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# DISCOVERY AND REVELATION



H. F. HAMILTON



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and the REV. G. E. NEWSOM, M.A.,  
*Professor of Pastoral Theology in King's  
College, London, Reader at the Temple  
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*Theology*

# DISCOVERY AND REVELATION

A Study in Comparative Religion

BY THE REV.

H. F. HAMILTON, D.D.

AUTHOR OF 'THE PEOPLE OF GOD'

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE Editors of The Layman's Library were kind enough to suggest that a short and popular outline of the argument of the first volume of a former work of mine called *The People of God* would be of some use to the public for whom The Layman's Library is intended. In this book, therefore, I have tried to say a second time, and in a shorter and simpler form, what I have already said in the first volume and in the first three chapters of the second volume of *The People of God*. Although, with the exception of one passage of some length, the subject-matter has been entirely rewritten and in many cases rearranged, the present work contains but few points which are not to be found in *The People of God*.<sup>1</sup> For this reason it has not seemed necessary to give detailed proofs or to argue out special points at any length. Those who seek for fuller discussions of the various positions adopted may find them in the corresponding portions of *The People of God*.

<sup>1</sup> Most of these will be found in Chapter xi.

The book contains a sustained argument, and it is very necessary to start with a clear idea of the nature of that argument and its contents.

The first ten chapters are written from the point of view of the scientific student of religious phenomena. They do not assume any kind of religious belief whatever ; they try to determine, by the application of purely scientific methods of criticism and investigation, what the facts actually were regarding the origin of the Christian religion ; and so the results reached are as true for the unbeliever as for the believer. With Chapter *xi.*, however, there is a change. In this chapter we assume for the first time that there is a God who may give a Revelation of Himself to men ; and then we review the historical results reached in Chapters *i.* to *x.* in the light of this assumption. Chapter *xii.* adduces an additional consideration, which supports the conclusions of Chapter *xi.*

Let us now try to make a rapid survey of Chapters *i.-x.* We start from the fact that the belief in one Almighty God has had two, and only two, sources : the philosophy of the Greeks and the religion of the Hebrews ; and we try to see how

each of these two monotheisms came into existence, how they compare with each other, and what their history has been. Before these two monotheisms appeared, the civilised world lay in the grip of polytheism. Chapter I. discusses the origin of the Greek belief in one God ; that belief was due to the discovery of the principle of the universality of natural causation, and to the flood of inquiry into the problem of how the universe came to be what it is which necessarily followed that discovery. We do not proceed at once to discuss the origin of the Hebrew monotheism, because it is more difficult to get at. It is better to take the Hebrew monotheism, as it stands in the pages of the Old Testament, and to get a clear understanding of what it was, by contrasting it with the beliefs of the polytheistic world in general (Chapter II.), with those of the Greek philosophers (Chapter III.), and with those of that large class of Hebrews who did not accept the teaching of the monotheistic prophets (Chapter IV.). It will be seen that, though both may be called 'monotheisms,' yet the monotheism of the Hebrews was an entirely different thing from that of the Greek philosophers, and preceded it by several hundred years.

After this one has to grapple with the problem of the origin of the Hebrew belief in one God, and with this the next three chapters, v. to vii., are concerned. Chapter v. shows that the Hebrew monotheism was not the result of any process of reasoning, whether from the facts of existence, or from the facts of history. Then the discussion in Chapter vi. on the psychology of prophecy leads to the conclusion of Chapter vii., that the cause we are seeking is to be found in religious experience. The Hebrew prophets passed through moments of intense vividness in which they felt themselves to be in the presence of an Almighty and All-holy Person. Hence their belief in Him.

Chapters viii. to x. briefly trace the subsequent history of the Jewish religion. First of all, we see how, as a direct consequence of the continuation of these experiences in association with the name of the national God of Israel, the Hebrew national religion, after the return from the Exile in Babylon, became organised upon the basis of a definite ethical monotheism—this being the only case of its kind known to history. Chapter ix. discusses the relation of that unique Figure, Jesus of Nazareth, to the Jewish religion; and Chapter x. shows how, as a result of His work and

teaching, the Jewish national religion was reorganised in such a way as to enable it to become universal; and this, again, is the only instance of its kind known to history.

So far we have been dealing with religious phenomena in exactly the same spirit as that in which the botanist deals with plants and their phenomena. 'Comparative Religion' is, like botany, a special science, and its conclusions are not affected by anything that the scientist believes about God; in both cases the student has to deal with the phenomena which present themselves to his senses and with them alone. But it remains now to rise to a higher point of view. Suppose that the universe came into existence because an Almighty Person created it, and suppose that that Person may reveal Himself to men, what are we to say of the Jewish religion and its extraordinary history? It will be seen in Chapter XI. that there is very good reason to think (1) that the Greek monotheism represented a discovery of God by man; (2) that the Hebrew monotheism was a self-Revelation of God to man; (3) that the Hebrew national religion and its outward forms were chosen by God to be the medium of this Revelation, and



that they possessed privileges and a divine sanction not given to any others ; (4) that the Church of Jesus the Messiah is the sphere of salvation, *i.e.* of the knowledge of the one true God and of Jesus whom He sent as Saviour ; and that it is the will of God that all men should unite before Him in this one visible, self-conscious brotherhood.

One other word of explanation remains to be said. The words 'Yahweh' and 'mono-Yahwism,' which occur so often in the following pages, will sound strange and uncouth in the ears of many. 'Yahweh' is a personal name, the name by which the national God of the Hebrews was distinguished from other gods, not only by the Hebrews, but by other peoples as well. And this word occurs on almost every page of the Hebrew Scriptures. Unfortunately it is translated in our Bibles by the words 'LORD' and 'God,' the capitals being used to distinguish it from the ordinary Hebrew words for a lord or a god. Thus, wherever we find the words 'LORD God' in our Old Testaments, they stand for the Hebrew 'Yahweh God,' and wherever 'Lord God' occur, they stand for 'Lord Yahweh'.<sup>1</sup> There

<sup>1</sup> Compare, for instance, Genesis ii. 4 with xv. 2, and see the notes on these verses in the margin of the Revised Version.

is some doubt as to how 'Yahweh' ought to be pronounced; some authorities prefer 'Jahve'; the one thing certain about it is that 'Jehovah' is wrong.

The Biblical quotations are all taken from the Revised Version except that 'Yahweh' has in every case been substituted for LORD and GOD. The very strangeness of 'Yahweh' is the reason for this. 'LORD,' 'GOD,' and 'Jehovah' are all associated in our minds with philosophical conceptions of the Deity which had no place whatever in the minds of the Old Testament writers; and so until we get rid of these words we are constantly reading into the pages of the Bible these philosophical notions which are really not there at all. 'Yahweh,' on the other hand, has no such associations.

I have been compelled to use that hybrid and ugly word 'mono-Yahwism,' because it expresses a truth which cannot be expressed by any other word I know of. The Hebrew prophets believed that there was but one Almighty God: this truth is covered by the word 'monotheism.' But 'monotheism' does not go beyond this, whereas the prophets did. The prophets said not merely that there is but one Almighty God,

but also that the God known to all the world by the Name of 'Yahweh,' the national God of Israel, is that one Almighty God. Obviously, this goes far beyond a mere 'monotheism'; it can best be described by the word 'mono-Yahwism.' For the sake of clearness of thought, therefore, one must put up with what is at once uncouth and unfamiliar.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

	PAGE
<u>POLYTHEISM AND THE GREEK MONOTHEISM.</u>	1
I. Contrast between the modern and the ancient worlds. Monotheism alone credible to-day; polytheism alone credible in ancient times.	1
II. The cause of this contrast—	
1. Not to be found in any lack of earnestness in the belief of the polytheists.	3
2. Nor in any lack of intelligence.	3
3. But in a different conception of how things are made to happen; 'Natural' causation is the constant interference of multitudes of unseen spirits.	4
4. The discovery by the Greek philosophers that the whole world must spring from a single source, a single God.	8
III.	
1. The Greek monotheism was a human discovery.	11
2. In no sense an evolution of religion.	12
3. Differences between this new view and the old religions.	
(a) 'Doubt' as to God's existence now becomes possible for the first time.	13
(b) And also as to whether He hears the prayers of men.	14
(c) Religion becomes one universal fact. Distinctions between national re- ligions disappear.	15
(d) Morality becomes the whole duty of man to God,	16

## CHAPTER II

	PAGE
THE ONE GOD WHO SURVIVED THE RISE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY . . . . .	18

The God and the religion of the Hebrews survived when all others perished, because this God, according to the prophets, differed from all the other ancient gods in that He was declared to be

- I. The Creator and sole supreme governor of the entire universe. 19
- II. Righteous Himself, and requiring righteousness as the first condition of His favour. 20
- III. Incapable of being represented by any image. 23

## CHAPTER III

THE GOD OF THE HEBREW PROPHETS CONTRASTED WITH THE GOD OF THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS . . . . .	26
--	----

The prophetic teaching about the one true God has the following points in common with the ideas of the polytheists, and in contrast to those of the philosophers. The prophets assumed without question or argument, just as the polytheists did :

- I. That a god called Yahweh exists. 27
- II. That He is keenly interested in His people. 29
- III. That He is of the same mental type as men and shows what is passing through His mind to certain chosen individuals. 30
- IV. That He stands in the relation of a God to Israel and to Israel alone. His choice of Israel. 31
- V. That the Hebrew national system of religion is His own appointment, 32

CHAPTER IV

	PAGE
YAHWEH'S POWER AND CHARACTER ACCORD- ING TO THE BELIEF OF THE AVERAGE ISRAELITE . . . . .	37
I. Many in Israel worshipped Yahweh as a charac- teristic Semitic deity. What was a charac- teristic Semitic deity?	
1. A god whose interests were limited to a particular group of men called his 'people.' His prestige as a god rose and fell with their success as a nation.	38
Proof that these ideas existed among the Israelites.	39
2. A god who cared more for ritual than for morality.	42
Proof that many Israelites believed this of Yahweh.	43
II. Explanation of the prevalence of these beliefs in Israel.	44
III. Apart from the 'true' prophets, the religion of Israel was plainly of the same type and tend- ing in the same direction as the other Semitic religions. Hence the cause of the Hebrew monotheism must be something peculiar to the prophets.	46

CHAPTER V

WHENCE DID THE PROPHETS DERIVE THEIR BELIEF? NOT FROM <u>REASON</u> . . . .	49
I. The prophetic monotheism was not derived from the same source as the Greek, the study of the natural world and of the problem of existence.	
1. They had the same idea of causation as the polytheists. Yahweh issues orders to His creatures which they understand	

	PAGE
and obey. Standing orders and special commands.	50
2. Their stock of natural science was that which was common to the polytheistic world of their day.	55
3. Philosophical arguments and modes of thought find no place in the Old Testament.	56
II. Nor was it derived from reflection on the facts of history.	
1. On the unquestioned assumptions of that day, other gods were proved by history to be stronger than Yahweh.	58
2. The prophets do not appeal to history to prove their case.	59
III. Whence did they derive the moral or ethical element in their belief?	
1. The real nature of that ethical element. <i>i.e.</i> the conviction that Yahweh requires righteousness from His people.	61
2. This was not derived from reflection on the facts of existence.	63
3. Nor from a study of the facts of history.	63

## CHAPTER VI

PROPHETS AND PROPHECYING . . . . .	68
Prophecy universal in ancient religions. Certain persons were regarded as mouthpieces of divine spirits, because they were subject to abnormal mental or physical conditions.	69
I. This is true of the 'false' prophets of Yahweh.	70
II. And also of the 'true' prophets, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah.	
1. The intense emotion to which they were subject.	72
2. They used the same methods as the false prophets.	73



## CONTENTS

xvii

PAGE

3. They attack the religious experiences of the ‘false’ prophets in order to establish their own.	74
---	----

## CHAPTER VII

WHENCE DID THE PROPHETS DERIVE THEIR BELIEF? FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE .	78
I. In the experience described in Isaiah vi. we have an explanation of his belief in	
1. Yahweh’s omnipotence and	80
2. His moral character.	85
3. The same cause may be inferred in the case of others.	89
II. The ‘natural’ explanation, applicable to the experi- ences of the ‘false’ prophets, is not applicable in the case of the true.	91

## CHAPTER VIII

THE ORGANISATION OF THE JEWISH RELIGION UPON A MONOTHEISTIC BASIS . . . .	97
I. Mono-Yahwism appears first in the eighth century B.C. The majority of the people rejected it.	97
II. The Exile in Babylon and its effects.	100
III. The Return carried out in the belief that Yahweh is the only God. Mono-Yahwism the official creed of the nation. Ezra and the Law.	102
IV. The Jews in the centuries immediately preceding the Birth of Jesus Christ.	104
Their exclusiveness.	104
The collection of the Scriptures.	106

## CHAPTER IX

JESUS CHRIST AND THE RELIGION OF THE JEWS . . . . .	110
I. Jesus freed men from the Jewish Law in one or other of two ways. Either	111

	PAGE
1. He claimed a supernatural authority to set it aside : Or	
2. He denied that the Law had ever had any supernatural authority behind it.	
II. That the former alternative alone is true may be inferred from	
1. The state of religious belief in His day.	113
2. His relation to the Messianic Hope.	116
3. The evidence of the Gospels.	117
(a) He observed the Law, but refused to obey the Tradition of the Elders.	118
(b) He shared the belief that the Jews had exclusive religious privileges.	121
(c) If He had denied the supernatural origin of the Law, some record of that denial must have come down to us.	122
(d) His disciples remained unshaken in their inherited beliefs in the Law.	123
III. 1. A claim to possess divine authority not out of keeping with the conditions of thought in His day.	125
2. The Gospels represent Him as claiming such an authority.	126

## CHAPTER X

THE RE-ORGANISATION OF THE JEWISH RELIGION . . . . .	128
1. The Jewish religion organised by the Mosaic Covenant. Acceptance with God depended upon observing the Law.	128
II. Jesus claimed to be Messiah and undertook to institute a New Covenant.	129
III. The Reorganisation brought about by the New Covenant.	129
1. Salvation made to depend, not on the Law,	

# CONTENTS

xix

	PAGE
but on faith in Jesus as Messiah and the saving efficacy of His Death.	132
2. The Law unnecessary. Hence the universalism of Christianity.	132
3. A new Israel, the Church.	134

## CHAPTER XI

### DISCOVERY AND REVELATION 138

I. We now assume that there is a God who may give a Revelation of Himself.	
1. 'Religion' and 'religion.'	139
2. 'True' and 'false' in religions.	140
3. 'Revelation' and 'revelation' or 'Discovery.'	141
II. The polytheistic religions	
1. Contain no Religion or Revelation.	143
2. But a 'revelation' was given in Nature.	144
III. The experiences of the Hebrew prophets	
1. Are instances of Religion and	145
2. Constitute a Revelation.	148
IV. The limitation of such experiences to the Hebrew prophets and their continuance through so many centuries implies	
1. A divine choice of the Name of Yahweh as a medium of Revelation.	149
2. And that a special divine sanction was given to this religious fellowship and its outward forms.	154
V. The place of this religion in history.	
1. A world-wide, age-long scheme of a beneficent character.	156
2. The providential part it played in the history of civilisation.	157
3. The objection that this implies an exclusive choice of one religion.	160
VI. The Christian religion.	
1. Jesus the Messiah.	162
2. The new Israel, the Church of the Messiah.	163
3. Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God.	165

## CHAPTER XII

	PAGE
THE FULFILMENT OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE .	169
I. The meaning of ' the Messianic Hope.'	
1. The union of Israel and Yahweh.	171
2. The universality of Israel's religion.	172
II. The grounds on which the Hope was based.	
1. Yahweh's Name.	174
2. What He has begun in Israel He will complete.	175
3. Israel's disobedience alone restrains the Day of the Lord.	176
III. The Hope in the Apocalyptic books.	177
1. Based on the same grounds.	178
2. Though some new features are added, the essentials remain the same.	179
IV. The fulfilment of the Hope.	
1. In some respects, the expectations of the prophets failed of fulfilment.	181
2. Yet in Jesus Christ there is a Revelation of God.	181
3. And in Christianity the Jewish religion is becoming universal.	184

## CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION . . . . .	187
I. The Christian and the philosophical conceptions of God are two different systems of thought. We must hold to one or the other : we cannot combine them.	187
II. Modernism and the Christian Creed.	192

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 770-730 B.C. Amos and Hosea proclaim Yahweh as the Almighty and All-holy God. Earliest proof of Mono-Yahwism.
- 586 B.C. Fall of Jerusalem. Thales, the first of the Greeks to explain the world without reference to the polytheistic gods, began to teach at Miletus.
- 537 B.C. Return of the Jews from Babylon.
- 469-399 B.C. Life of Socrates. According to one authority the first of the Greek philosophers to teach that there is but one holy God.
- 444 B.C. Ezra reads the Law. Mono-Yahwism becomes the official creed of the whole nation.
- 427-347 B.C. Life of Plato.
- 385-322 B.C. Life of Aristotle.



## CHAPTER I

### POLYTHEISM AND THE GREEK MONOTHEISM

‘I AM the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt have none other gods before me.’ If any one of the commandments can be said to be out of date, it is this one; for it is difficult to imagine an educated person of the present day feeling tempted to worship one god rather than another. Men often ask themselves whether they will worship at all, but no one ever makes up his mind to worship this god rather than that; for every one knows that if worship is indeed a reality, there is only one God to whom it can be addressed. And therefore we can hardly think of choosing one god in preference to another.

But of course it has not been so always. There was a time when every nation, every tribe, and every city had its own god or set of gods. There were ‘gods many and lords many,’ and men could choose, and did choose,



between them, worshipping now one and now another. In those days no one thought over the question whether he would worship or not—every one did that as a matter of course—the only question was, which god was it most expedient for him in his particular circumstances to worship? which god could help him most?

It is plain then that if we could be suddenly transplanted back to that age, we would find ourselves in an atmosphere of thought about religion which was very different from that to which we are accustomed. And the difference is mainly in this, that whereas we moderns all regard monotheism as the only possible form of religious belief, the ancients thought that polytheism alone could make any serious claim to truth and reality. Here is an extraordinary contrast—monotheism as a form of religion was almost as incredible to the ancient world as polytheism is to us to-day. It is plain that their view of the world must have been very different from ours, and that there must have been in their minds certain assumptions and habits of thought, underlying all their ideas of religion, which are entirely absent from our minds. We must therefore try to get at those assumptions and

tricks of thought which made polytheism so grim a reality, and to see how and why they have lost their power to dominate the minds of men to-day.

If any one thinks that the ancients were not really in earnest in their belief in many gods, he had better read some of the ancient Babylonian or Assyrian psalms and hymns. The idea of one Almighty sovereign deity was there in their minds, but no one took it seriously: their real belief, that is, the belief on which they acted in practical life, was the belief in many gods. This is plainly seen by the fact that they did not hesitate to ascribe the chief sovereignty and supreme power now to one god and now to another, flattering each in turn; but when a man was in some sore strait, or overtaken by some dire calamity, and when he wished to get close to the powers which really dominated his life, he invoked no one supreme God, but a multitude of gods and goddesses, appealing to each in turn and calling upon those whose names he knew not as well as those whose names he knew.

Some of us are in the habit of thinking that the ancients were no doubt serious enough in their belief, just as modern savages are, but that, like

modern savages, they were not of a high order of intelligence. But any one who has followed the course of recent archæological research will know how to make short work of this. The men who built up the ancient civilisations on the Euphrates and the Nile were neither children nor savages.

Why, then, did they believe so seriously and implicitly in what seems to us so absurd and childish—the existence of many independent deities? Why did they not see the folly of the thing at once? To answer this question fully would demand a good deal of preliminary investigation and consideration; perhaps, it will suffice to give here a summary and an explanation of results, and those who wish to go into the matter more carefully may do so elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Strange as it may seem, the ancients found that their every day experience of life confirmed them in their polytheism: they could not explain the world and the things which went on in it, except by their belief in many gods. They had a wholly different idea of nature from ours, and in this lay the secret of the whole matter. They thought that the universe was alive with spirits and un-

<sup>1</sup> *The People of God*, vol. i. ch. i.

seen beings of every imaginable kind—some more powerful and some less so, some malignant and some of a kindly disposition, some for this tribe and some for that, some in the air and some in the water, and some in the trees and rocks. And whenever anything happened, which was not directly caused by human effort, it must, they thought, have been due to the immediate action then and there of some one or other of these spirits. The really important thing to grasp is that they had no conception corresponding to what we mean when we speak of ‘natural causes.’ We have learned that if a man has a fever this is due to some antecedent conditions in himself and his environment; and if we want to know the cause of the fever, we look for it in some ‘natural’ events or circumstances. But the ancients had not yet learned that there are ‘natural,’ *i.e.* impersonal, causes in each case: they explained events by saying that some god or spirit had then and there stepped in and made the thing happen thus, simply because he was at the time minded so to do. The causes of things, they thought, lay in the minds and wills of unseen beings, not in the nature of the things themselves.

The greatest advance which the modern world

has made over the ancient is that we have learned to substitute natural causes for the immediate intervention of hosts of independent, unseen beings in order to account for the changes which are constantly taking place all around us.

The ancients had not been trained to observe things accurately, nor, indeed, had they any special interest in doing so ; hence they did not realise that events happen in certain orders or sequences, which, because they are repeated so often, may be observed and counted on to recur again. And, accordingly, every time the lightning flashed or the thunder rolled, this was to them the strongest conceivable proof of the truth of polytheism. They could imagine no other cause for these and similar events except the action of some god who stepped in then and there to make things happen thus. If it were not the work of some unseen being, what on earth could have caused it ?

Of course, if any one will attend to the facts of nature with care for any considerable period of time, he will soon find that events succeed each other in certain definite orders, and that when certain conditions are present, one can confidently predict that certain results will follow.

Once this point is reached, the reign of the gods is over ; things which can be predicted from the course of preceding events cannot depend on the whims and caprices of the old gods. And this was what actually happened. As civilisation advanced, men came into closer touch with ever-widening areas of nature and became familiar with the course which events normally took therein. As social conditions became stable, each generation inherited the results of the observations made by its predecessors. And so as time went on, an increasing number of the events of life were seen to depend on preceding conditions, and the area in which the old gods were believed to operate decreased proportionately. It only needed that some one should take a comprehensive grasp of all this growing mass of scientific knowledge, should view it as a single whole, and should draw the conclusion that not only separate bits of nature here and there, but also the entire scheme of things as a whole was independent of the wills of the polytheistic gods. Once this point was reached, nature being what it is, every fresh observation of fact tended to confirm this view, and to discredit still further the old polytheism. The chief strength of the

old gods lay in the fact that their existence supplied an explanation of the phenomena of nature ; but now a new explanation was at hand, and one which, when once men set themselves to study the facts of nature closely and deliberately, proved to be ever so much more satisfactory.

The first person, so far as we know, to draw this great inference was Thales, the earliest of the Greek philosophers, who lived in the sixth century B.C. Thales was sure that the universe, with all its manifold changes, could be explained without recourse to the interference of the polytheistic gods. He thought the world was some great living thing, which continually moved and changed just because it was its nature so to do : there was some primitive substance, he thought, out of which all the different objects and facts of nature were evolved ; not that some one came along and worked at this substance from without and made it take all these different shapes and forms and textures ; but that the substance itself was alive and moved and changed itself and went through all these evolutions by itself. Thales thought that this primitive substance was water ; others soon found that this was



unsatisfactory, and some said it was air, and others said it was fire. But there were plainly objections to all these theories, and others maintained that in the original beginning there was no one single substance, but a number of different kinds of substances which somehow became entangled and combined with each other, and so formed the present complicated scheme of things. This, however, introduced a new thought. How did these different things become 'entangled' ? There must have been some mind at work to give the initial impulse, and to arrange them in the proper way, else why should there be all this regularity and all this neat adaptation ? And why should the world be a place so suitable for men to live in ?

Socrates, according to one authority, was the first to infer from the presence of design in the world that there is a benevolent mind behind all that exists—a Being who is at once the Maker and the Sovereign of the universe, to Whom alone the term God is applicable, and to Whom alone there can be any meaning in offering worship. From that day onwards, men have debated whether such a Being exists or not, and they have been asking themselves whether they will wor-

ship or not, but no one dreams of going back to the old belief in many gods, or of asking himself whether he will worship this god or that god. And so the change was complete : the old polytheism became utterly discredited and monotheism became the only possible form of religion.

The real reason, then, why polytheism is impossible to-day is because we have such a very different idea of the world from that of the ancients—an idea which has come to us from the discovery of what is called ‘natural causation.’ The ancient world is now so far away from us that we have forgotten that there ever was a time when men did not believe in the universality of natural causes, and we find it difficult to imagine what the world seemed to be like to people who did not know this truth about the causes of things. If, however, we put ourselves back into the minds of the ancients we shall find that with their conception of causation, polytheism seemed both a reasonable and a necessary form of belief ; just as with our idea of causation, monotheism seems the only possibility. Polytheism was the characteristic product of the ancient stage of culture, the ancient view of the world, the ancient idea of how things were made to happen : monotheism

is the characteristic product of the modern stage of culture, the modern view of the world and the modern conception of causation. The period of transition lies roughly between Thales and Socrates,<sup>1</sup> although, of course, it took many centuries before the leaven of the new conceptions penetrated to the lower strata of society.

It is of importance for our purposes to keep this fact clearly in mind because we shall see presently that there is one extraordinary exception to this rule. In the case of the Hebrew people we have the ancient stage of culture, the ancient view of the world, the ancient idea of causation—in fact, all the conditions which everywhere else made the ancient polytheism such a grim reality ; and yet in spite of this, the Hebrew prophets, though themselves subject to these same conditions, maintained a pure spiritual and ethical monotheism. The causes of this prophetic belief and its significance will be discussed below.

But before going on to the Hebrew monotheism, a few points should be noticed. In the first place, one should observe that the discovery of the truth of monotheism by the Greeks was

<sup>1</sup> 586 B.C.—399 B.C. See Chronological Table, p. xxi.

from beginning to end a process of observation and reflection. No Christian will have any interest in denying that it was in some sense shaped and guided by the power of the Holy Spirit ; but this is a knowledge about God which men have wrung for themselves out of the study of the facts of existence ; we can trace the process from point to point, and everywhere it has been wrought out by the application of human faculties to the phenomena and the riddle of the universe. If, therefore, the term ' discovery ' is applicable to any advance in human knowledge, it is applicable to this.

In the next place, this change cannot be regarded as an evolution of religion. The fact of the matter is that the new views prevailed by first slaying the old religions. Men advanced to a monotheistic belief at the cost of denying the existence of every one of the ancient polytheistic gods. An evolution implies that there is something which evolves and yet remains the same throughout ; there must be some continuity of existence. But in this case an intellectual force arose outside all the ancient polytheistic religions, made them all impossible, and then went on to introduce a new monotheistic type of

belief. The religious life of man was thrown back upon itself, being deprived of any object on which to expend itself ; the practice of religion, except in outward show, became impossible ; men did conform to the state religion, but all those who were influenced by the new ideas ceased to regard it as anything but a pure form. What did survive was the ineradicably religious nature of man, which turned to the new God discovered by philosophical reflection to seek satisfaction there.

When Socrates and Plato affirmed that there was a mind or spirit behind the veil of phenomena, religion again became possible ; for now again a personal object was set forth to Whom worship could be offered. But in several ways the new religion was very different from the old. For one thing, there was no self-evident proof of the existence of this God ; if you believed in Him, you did so as the result of a somewhat intricate process of reasoning ; and as there was more than one point at which disagreement was possible, there were many who doubted the truth of the theistic conclusion. In fact, for the first time in human history, 'doubt' became a possibility ; hitherto men had been absolutely certain ; now

they had to grope their way and might miss it altogether.

But the self-confidence of man's religious life had to endure a yet more trying shock. Even if you felt that a God really does exist, there was still a further question to be faced. Does He really take any interest in men? Is it possible for human prayers to penetrate through into the mysterious solitudes where He dwells? The old religions had been very comforting, because gods and men lived close together. The gods were deeply interested in men, and men could tell what was passing through the minds of the gods by the things which they did, much as they read the minds of other men. And if the gods were offended, men were sure that they understood them, and there were well-known methods of appeasing them and gaining their favour.

But you could not be so confident regarding the new God. You could not read His mind, because He did not reveal His feelings and motives by continually interfering with the course of nature; the world of man's environment He had handed over to impersonal laws and forces, and no one really knew whether He had feelings and motives at all. After all, men were but a very

small part of creation, and the absurdity of ascribing a human constitution to the Infinite Spirit became patent to all. It was a question whether He cared at all for man's worship and was ever influenced by his entreaties. Does He not dwell in far-distant realms of bliss where nothing so imperfect as man can ever hope to enter? If man can ever know Him, it is possible only for those few who are exceptionally enlightened and favoured; for the ordinary run of men it seemed impossible.

And then the new views worked a very complete revolution in men's attitude towards the externals of religion. In the first place, the old gods were each associated with a particular group of men—a race, a tribe, a nation, a city—gods and men were linked together in so many separate organisations—to each community of men there belonged its own god or set of gods. No gods took an equal interest in all men alike; the interests of the gods were divided up, some were united with one group of men and some with another. But with the new God of philosophy all this was blown away with one breath. He had not revealed Himself to any one race alone; He had only been discovered by the patient



efforts of individual thinkers ; and therefore, if He took any interest in men at all, it must be in all men alike : He is the Father of all or of none, for we are all His offspring. Hence there can be no exclusiveness in religion, no specially privileged races or classes, for God as Creator stands in the same relation to all men.

And once more. The old gods had each his own proper ritual which he had himself laid down for his own service. And it was the duty of the priesthood to preserve this tradition, and to see that all was duly and rightly accomplished according to the given formulas. The nation brought its offerings of gold or silver, of sheep and oxen, of food and drink, all the things which men themselves prized most highly, for in these the gods were well pleased.

But the new God was not a man that He could be served in this way, or that He should care for meat or drink. He had never instituted any set of externals ; hence all these things are of human contrivance and entirely beside the mark, if the mark be the service of God. The only possible way to serve Him is to do one's duty as a man, and to fill that place in the universe which is set before one.



It is interesting to note that all our objections to the idea of special religious privilege and to ritual in the service of God date from this period, and have their origin here. They do not come from the Bible. There is plenty of warning in both the New and the Old Testaments against the abuse of ritual, and the idea that sacrifice or mere privilege can be made a substitute for a morally upright life, but it is nowhere said that all ritual is meaningless, or that all religions are equally true or false. These ideas, together with the possibility of religious doubt, come to us from the philosophic inquiry into the meaning and ultimate nature of existence : they have no place in the Bible or the teaching of Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GOD WHO SURVIVED THE RISE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

It was said in the last chapter that the rise of philosophical monotheism destroyed all the old gods and the old religions. To this, however, there was one exception—Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, and the religion of the Hebrews. Although all the religions of the ancient world, including those of Greece and Rome, have utterly perished, the religion of the insignificant little Palestinian state of Israel has flourished, and still continues to flourish, in a reorganised form, amongst the most cultivated and progressive nations of the world.

Let us then ask, what was there about this ancient religion which fitted it to survive? The answer may be put in one word: it alone survived because it alone presented to the world a Deity who could stand the searching

criticism of philosophical inquiry. If we take the teaching about the national God which was set forth by the great Hebrew prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., and which was afterwards adopted as the creed of the whole nation, we shall find that Yahweh was distinguished from all other gods in at least the following respects.

(1) The other gods tolerated each other's existence. There were an unlimited number of them, and though some were more powerful than others, still the lesser existed and were worshipped side by side with the greater. Men served now one god and now another without ever imagining that the practice could be blamed by any one.

But the God of Israel was quite different from this. His worshippers were not only forbidden to worship any other, they were also required to believe that no other had any existence whatever. 'I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no god.' Yahweh, the God of Israel, was declared to be the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, the Sovereign of the world, and Supreme Director of the entire course of human history. The things which the other nations

worshipped were not worthy to be called ' gods ' ; they were mere nonentities, emptiness, idols of wood and stone—at their best, subordinate spirits, and at their worst, offscouring and filthiness.

(2) As a general rule, the ancient gods were made after the fashion of men, not only in thought and feeling, but also in moral character. As there were no perfectly good men, so there were no perfectly good gods ; and many of the gods were as bad as the worst of men : they lied, they fought and cheated each other, and were capable of all the vices known to men.

They took, it is true, a certain interest in the moral life of their worshippers, but it was only a very limited interest. The ancients had no idea that the gods were by their very nature opposed to all wrong and impurity ; if the gods condescended to notice the moral qualities of human conduct, it was only in so far as that conduct injured or benefited the community. Since the god and his people were bound up in one social organisation, anything which injured the community injured its god also, and was resented by him. Hence patriotism was rewarded and treachery punished by the gods.

There were some gods of justice ; and the moral

codes current in the ancient world were always ascribed to, and placed under the sanction of some deity. But what was expected of the god of justice was an impartial decision in cases of special difficulty and assistance in detecting culprits, rather than that he should give unremitting attention to searching out and punishing every offence of one man against another. The attitude of the gods towards human conduct is seen in the following fact. As a general rule, any misfortune which befell a man proved that some god or goddess was angry with him ; in fact, some misfortune was the only proof that a god had been offended. It was not always possible to tell which deity was angry, nor for what reason ; it might be because of some moral offence, but more probably it was because of some ritual error, some witting or unwitting mistake in the performance of the god's service. Hence in the ancient Babylonian penitential psalms we find lists of every conceivable kind of wrong-doing, both moral and ritual ; and these are evidently gone over in the hope that sooner or later the offence which has really roused the god's ire will be named and remission obtained. For this reason the ancient religions did not

exercise much influence upon the moral life of the people. Before they could do that, they needed a God who by His very nature was entirely pure and holy, and Who would never tolerate immorality and injustice between man and man.

What the others lacked was supplied by the Hebrew religion. Yahweh, according to the Hebrew prophets, was not only absolutely upright and inconceivably holy in Himself, but His favour could never rest upon His people so long as they were guilty of immoral conduct. The so-called 'ethical teaching of the prophets' does not consist in a new and better classification of acts into right and wrong, nor in a more profound knowledge of the theory of moral conduct. As a general rule they accept the moral ideas of the people as adequate, presupposing that men are able to distinguish correctly between right and wrong. 'The ethical teaching of the prophets,' in so far as one can use such a phrase at all, consists in the vehemence with which they urge their countrymen to live up to what is already known to be right, and the grounds on which they base their appeal for amendment. Israel must lead an uncorrupt life because Yahweh can never tolerate a nation which allows injustice, cruelty

and fraud to flourish within its borders. Yahweh, then, according to the prophetic teaching, was both absolutely upright and required a similar uprightness as the first condition of His favour. Unlike other gods, no amount of sacrifice or ritual, no matter how costly or splendid, would, if offered by blood-stained hands, suffice to appease His anger.

(3) The ancient gods had each his image or idol which represented him. No one, of course, worshipped the wood and stone as such ; on the other hand, the polytheists seem to have found it impossible to imagine the offering of worship except before some visible representation of a deity. An image-less worship seemed to them like atheism.

This, then, is the third point in which Yahweh differed from all other gods. According to the teaching of the prophets, He was not to be likened to any created object, and His people must not make to themselves any graven image. With fine scorn they pointed to the man-made deities of the other nations, the gods who have mouths and speak not, eyes and see not, ears and hear not ;<sup>1</sup> but of Yahweh they thought as of a pure

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxv.

spiritual Person from whose presence there is no escape.

‘Whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there;  
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;  
Even there shall thy hand lead me,  
And thy right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, surely the darkness shall overwhelm me,  
And the light about me shall be night;  
Even the darkness hideth not from thee,  
But the night shineth as the day:  
The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.’<sup>1</sup>

These then are the three main respects in which Yahweh differed from all the other gods of the ancient world. Yahweh claimed to be the Creator of the Universe, Sovereign Ruler of all the world; there was no one, in heaven or earth, who could be put in the same class with Him: He alone was the proper object of human worship, and He alone could rightly be called ‘God.’ Yahweh, again, alone among the ancient deities, was of infinite moral holiness, and required a morally upright life from His people. Finally, Yahweh refused to be identified with the likeness

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxxix. 7-12.



of any created thing, in heaven above or in the earth beneath.

To people who were just beginning to learn from the philosophers that, if there is a God, He must be One, and cannot be morally imperfect nor likened to any visible or tangible object, it must have come as a great surprise to find that an insignificant little Eastern state had for centuries been worshipping just such a God as this and serving Him as its national Deity. No wonder that many of the most devout and religiously-minded people attached themselves to the Jewish religion. No wonder they read the ancient, time-honoured Scriptures, which told of the one God who had created heaven and earth, of His holiness and His care for His people.

The rise of philosophy, though fatal to every other ancient religion, was unable to injure this ; indeed, by making men conscious of a need of one Almighty and All-Holy God it prepared them for the rapid expansion of the Jewish religion.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOD OF THE HEBREW PROPHETS CONTRASTED WITH THE GOD OF THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

BEFORE we take up the question as to how the Hebrew prophets came to know of a God like this, let us understand more clearly what they thought about Him. As was said above, they maintained that Yahweh was the only God, that He was morally holy, and that He must not be identified with any created object ; it was this coincidence with the teaching of the best philosophers which gave the religion of Yahweh the power to survive when all the old cults melted away under the dissolving influences of philosophical reflection. But we must not fail to observe that Yahweh, or rather the teaching of the prophets about Yahweh, differed markedly in several important respects from the philosophical idea of God ; and it will be seen that where they

differ from the philosophers they have much in common with the polytheists.

In the first place, it was said in the first chapter that the existence of the new God of philosophy was not a self-evident fact ; you had to infer it by a rather complicated process of reasoning ; and since there might be two ways of arguing, it was possible to 'doubt' the very existence of this God. In this, then, the God of the Hebrew prophets differed from that of the philosophers ; for the prophets never argued themselves into a belief in His existence ; for them a state of 'doubt' was inconceivable ; they assumed the existence of a God called Yahweh as unquestioningly as the most unreflecting of the polytheists assumed the existence of their gods.

Moreover, the new God of the philosophers could not be identified with any of the polytheistic deities ; they might call Him 'Zeus,' but no one imagined that the existence of the ancient Zeus had been proved by a new method. The philosophers discovered something new, some One who had not been known before ; and in His presence all the old gods of polytheism vanished like phantoms of the night.

But the curious thing is that the Almighty

God of the Hebrew prophets was one of the gods whose existence was recognised by the polytheists. Yahweh, in fact, had a place in both the monotheistic religion of the prophets and in the polytheistic religion of the ancient world.

The prophets and the polytheists had in common the same unquestioned assumption that a divine Being known by the name of Yahweh, actually did exist. But, on the one hand, while the prophets declared that there was no other God but Yahweh, and that He was both Almighty and All-Holy, the polytheists, on the other, declared that Yahweh took His place as one among many other similar beings in the polytheistic world of gods. One cannot insist too strongly on the fact that the prophets were not proclaiming a God whose existence no one had yet recognised ; on the contrary, they stood for the almighty power and holiness of one of the numerous gods who were worshipped by the polytheists.

In this respect, then, there is the widest difference between the prophets and the philosophers. For when the philosophers disputed among themselves as to whether there was one Almighty

God or not, they argued about the ultimate nature of existence, as to whether it was spiritual or material ; the personality of any one of the gods known to the polytheists did not concern them in the least ; whereas, when the prophets disputed the same point with the polytheists, the whole question turned upon the power and character of this particular God Yahweh ; the prophets were not conscious that there was a problem of existence to be solved ; their whole point against the polytheists was in effect this : you worship Yahweh as though He were one among many other gods, but we know that this is wrong, that Yahweh is Almighty and All-Holy, and that no other god but Him has any real existence at all.

Another difference, closely connected with this, should also be noted. The philosophers were by no means sure that the one God really cared for men or heard their prayers ; if it was at all possible for man to have intercourse with God, it was certainly not possible for all, but only for the few who were in some way specially enlightened and purified. In this respect, again, the prophets had much more in common with the polytheists than with the philosophers ; for it

never occurred to them to ask whether Yahweh was interested in His people and whether He heard their cries ; that was a self-evident fact which none would think of denying.

Then, again, the philosophers were careful not to fashion the new God after the human pattern. His mental life, they thought, could not be likened to that of man : the only thing they could be quite sure of was that He dwelt enthroned in distant realms of spiritual purity, which were almost, if not quite, inaccessible to man. No one could fully comprehend His thoughts or read His mind. The best man could do was to gaze at Him with awe from a vast distance. But any one who is at all familiar with the pages of the Old Testament knows how every kind of emotion is ascribed to Yahweh except fear and a sense of bodily pain. Yahweh is said to be angry and to be pleased, to feel compassion and jealousy, to hate and to love, to repent and to be sorrowful. And how intimately the prophets claim to know His thoughts and purposes ! With what confidence do they give expression to the feelings and determinations which were even then passing through His mind ! Here, again, there is another point in

which the prophets agree with the polytheists rather than with the philosophers.

And there are still others. As was seen above, the new God of philosophy could not be connected with any one race or religion. He had never revealed Himself in connection with any one more than with another : men had learned nothing about Him from the old religions ; He was the Father of all alike, if of any, and interested in no one special group to the exclusion of others. In this again the God of the prophets stands in the strangest contrast to that of the philosophers. The prophets are quite certain that the one Almighty God is interested in one group, in one people, in one religion, to the exclusion—at least for the time being—of others. Yahweh, it is true, is the Creator of all ; but Yahweh is also the God of Israel and the God of Israel alone ; for other nations, they said, did not worship Yahweh at all but other beings who were in reality not worthy of the name of ‘god.’ In so far as Yahweh is interested in other peoples, that interest is confined to their relations with His people Israel ; their enemies are His enemies, their allies, His friends ; He can on occasion use them to punish His people, and can again break

them to pieces when they have served His purpose. What the prophets say is not simply that there is only one God: they say that; but they also say something very much more than that. They say that this particular God, Yahweh, known to all the world as the God of Israel, is the one and only God, and that beside Him there is none else. Their teaching is not simply a monotheism. It is more than that: it is a mono-Yahwism. That each god was specially related to a particular group of men was one of the fundamental axioms of the polytheists; and so here again the prophets, or, as we may call them, the 'mono-Yahwists,' show some affinity with the polytheistic as against the philosophical world of thought.

Again, it was impossible for the philosophers to suppose that any one set of externals in religion was of more importance than another. The new God had not been known through any one of them; indeed, it was a little childish to suppose that He could eat bull's flesh or drink the blood of goats. All ritual and sacrifice were therefore entirely beside the mark and could make no real difference one way or the other. But this thought has no place in the Old Testa-



ment. The prophets do inveigh against the idea that ritual can be substituted for moral conduct, but they do not desire to do away with all ritual itself. In fact, the elaborate systems of ceremonial, the minute and exact regulations for the conduct of public worship which are laid down in the Old Testament, are the work of mono-Yahwists, of men who believed that the one and only God had Himself appointed these rules for His service. Ritual was not swept away as a thing wrong in itself; many of the governing ideas, common to the ritual of all the ancient polytheisms, were taken up by the mono-Yahwists and transfigured with a new meaning; the ancient regulations were re-drafted to express the belief that Yahweh is the one and only God, and that Israel is His people. This set of rules and this system of worship alone, the prophets claimed, had any real value; and they had a supreme value, being the appointment of Almighty God Himself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some authorities have tried to show that the prophets, and particularly such great prophets as Amos and Isaiah, inveighed against all ritual and all outward forms in religion. I am convinced that this is entirely a misreading of the prophetic message. What they objected to was the misuse of ritual and the idea, almost universal in their day, that costly sacrifices and the punctilious performance of the ritual were

We see then that, though both the prophets and the philosophers taught that there is but one God, yet they were very far from meaning the same thing. The prophets assumed without question the existence of a divine Person who in a literal sense answered to the name 'Yahweh'; the philosophers lent all their energies to the task of proving that there is a Person who may be called 'God.' The one Almighty God of the prophets was identified as the same Personal Being with one of the deities worshipped by the polytheists; the one God of philosophy was an entirely new Being who had no connection whatever with any of the polytheistic gods. The prophets again never thought of asking whether the one Almighty God was interested in men and heard their prayers—to them that was as self-evident as the fact that one man could hear what another said, for they ascribed to Yahweh a type of mental life not dissimilar from that of men; but the philosophers were

of more importance in the eyes of Yahweh than a moral life and the execution of justice. They emphasise how hateful all ritual is to Yahweh when it is offered by a people who are guilty of bloodshed and oppression; but they always suppose that the purified and regenerate Israel of the future will continue to bring sacrifices and offerings to Yahweh.

even less sure of the accessibility of God to prayer than they were of His existence. Then, again, the prophets were certain that the one God was interested in and worshipped by Israel alone out of all the families of the earth; but if there was one thing of which the philosophers were convinced, it was that God was not interested in any one race or religion much more than in any other. Finally, the prophets maintained that the outward system of Israel's national religion was the direct appointment of the living God; but the philosophers held that all the externals of religion were altogether a matter of indifference.

The monotheism of the prophets, therefore, was something very different from that of the philosophers. And it is a very remarkable thing that in all those points in which the teaching of the prophets differs from that of the philosophers, the prophets have something in common with the polytheists and the ancient religions of tradition. In the unquestioning assumption of the existence of a god called 'Yahweh' and of His accessibility to prayer as self-evident facts; in the belief that He was connected with Israel and Israel alone, and that Israel's national

religious organisation was His own appointment—in all these respects the prophets were at one with the traditional beliefs and habits of thought of the polytheistic world which hemmed them in on every side.

## CHAPTER IV

### YAHWEH'S POWER AND CHARACTER ACCORDING TO THE BELIEF OF THE AVERAGE ISRAELITE

BEFORE beginning to ask how the prophets came by their monotheistic belief, it will be well to observe closely the fact that even among the professed worshippers of Yahweh, there were large numbers—and at times almost all His worshippers—who regarded Him as neither more nor less than a characteristic Semitic deity. Between the prophets and the mass of the people of Israel there was this much in common—both assumed the existence of a God called Yahweh and His organic union with Israel without question or argument ; but there was this difference : the prophets said Yahweh is the only God, and is of an upright moral character ; the people said He was neither one nor the other.

No one can read the Old Testament, and especially the works of the prophets, without

noticing the signs of a constant struggle within the life of the nation—the bitter denunciations, the vehement exhortations, the terrible threats of punishment to come, which fill the pages of the prophets. It is the struggle between the mono-Yahwists and the polytheists in Israel, between those who said that the national God of Israel must be served as the one Almighty and All-Holy God, and those who desired to serve Him as a characteristic Semitic deity. The struggle began at least as early as the prophet Amos in the eighth century B.C., and continued on until the return from the exile in the sixth and fifth centuries, when the prophetic teaching became the accepted creed of the nation.

But what was a characteristic Semitic deity? Recent inquiries into the history of religion show that all the Semitic nations had much the same type of religion, the same ideas, the same customs, the same ritual. There are two chief characteristic ideas about the gods which we may notice.

In the first place, there was no such thing as a god who bore the same relation to all men; each god was interested in some special group of men to the exclusion of others; and every

nation or tribe had its own god, or set of gods, with whom it was united in a single social organism. As there could be no god without a people, so there could be no nation without a national god or gods.

In general, the power and presence of the deity were limited to the area within which his people were the dominant political power; and his prestige as a god rose and fell with their success or failure in the arts of war and peace. That the vast majority of the Israelites believed these things to be true of their national god can be abundantly illustrated from the Old Testament. Jephthah appears to have thought that Yahweh occupied the same position towards Israel which Chemosh occupied towards Moab, allowing that each had his own influence upon the course of events.<sup>1</sup> David complained that in driving him from his native soil, which is 'the inheritance of Yahweh,' his enemies had compelled him to go and serve other gods.<sup>2</sup> Solomon, again, allowed his wives to set up sanctuaries to their native gods, and built an 'high place' for Chemosh and another for Molech.<sup>3</sup> The most

<sup>1</sup> Judges xi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sam. xxvi. 19.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings xi. 1-8.

numerous indications, however, are to be found in the constantly repeated protests against the worship of the old Canaanite Baalim and of new gods imported from abroad. Ahab introduced the cult of the Baal of Tyre, and his son Ahaziah sent to inquire of Baalzebub of Ekron as to whether his sickness would be fatal or not.<sup>1</sup>

In the days of Jeremiah the whole of Palestine was trembling before the power of the Chaldæans. For centuries the Assyrians, whose capital was at Nineveh, had been pressing westwards towards Palestine and Egypt. But now Babylon had taken the place of Nineveh, and the Empire of the Assyrians had passed into the hands of the Chaldæans, whose victory over Egypt at Carchemish in 605 B.C. left the Palestinian states exposed to the full force of the Eastern Empire. Hitherto each national god in Palestine had been able to keep his own people from being exterminated by their neighbours, but now they were all overshadowed by a power far greater than all combined, and they were all chilled with a strange fear. It seemed that these new gods from the country of the great river Euphrates must be immensely more powerful than any of the well-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings i. 2; cf. also 1 Kings xix. 14; 2 Kings iii. 27.



known deities of Palestine. Accordingly, the only wise and prudent course seemed to be to submit, to confess the superiority of these new gods, and to worship them, not as substitutes for, but in addition to, the old national deities.

It was the frequent complaint of Jeremiah that Israel had thus gone after these deities of the Assyrians and Chaldæans, whose power seemed so irresistible.<sup>1</sup> And this was not the work of a mere handful of unconverted disbelievers; it was the policy adopted by the national leaders, the kings, princes, priests and some prophets.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to speak of these people as monotheists in any sense. They were to all intents and purposes polytheists of the common Semitic type, and to them Yahweh was the God of Israel, just as Chemosh was god of Moab. They had no intention of deserting the worship of their national god, much less of denying His existence; but they felt that political events were demonstrating the fact that the power of these other gods was greater than that of Yah-

<sup>1</sup> Jer. v. 19; vii. 17, 18; viii. 2; xix. 13; xlv. 17; Zeph. i. 5; 2 Kings xxiii. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. ii. 26, 27; cf. iv. 9; v. 1-5, 30, 31; vi. 13; viii. 2, etc.

weh, and so they thought it would be well to secure their position by courting their favour. They estimated Yahweh's power as other Semites did, by the position of His people in the world of international politics, and they felt compelled to admit that other deities were more powerful.

The other point about the Semitic gods is that they were of an indifferent moral character. What this means cannot be explained in one word. It does not mean that all the gods were entirely without any care for the moral conduct of men ; but it does mean that none of them cared more for moral conduct than for anything else ; for to all of them the due performance of the ritual and the costliness of the sacrifice that was offered were dearer than the moral qualities of human conduct. So long as the daily oblations were regularly offered, so long as the festivals were crowded, and the altars loaded with gifts, no one felt afraid that a god would punish injustice or immorality. Prosperity and success in war were the sure signs of a god's pleasure ; misfortune and disaster of any kind proved, both to the individual and to the nation, that the god was offended and must be placated. And the

best way to appease a deity was to be more punctilious in performing the ritual and more lavishly generous in one's gifts ; for, like men, the gods cared more for what concerned their own service than for anything else ; no one thought of a moral regeneration as the one condition essential to retaining the favour of the god.

Now there is abundant evidence that the majority of the Israelites persisted in ascribing to Yahweh a character such as this, and in trying to please Him by just such means as these. From the pages of the prophets of the Northern Kingdom, Amos and Hosea, we gather that the service of Yahweh was joyfully and richly maintained, that is, so far as sacrifice, ritual, and offerings were concerned ; we learn also that the people were confident of Yahweh's favour towards them, feeling sure that He was well pleased with the life of His people and the service they were rendering to Him. And yet at the same time, the prophets leave us in no manner of doubt that the national life of Israel was rotten to the core. The poor were atrociously abused and exploited by the rich ; justice was a thing unobtainable by any one who was not rich enough to buy or strong enough to compel it ; and even the very

festivals of Yahweh were scenes of wild excess and degrading self-indulgence.<sup>1</sup>

The same conditions prevailed in the kingdom of Judah, according to the great prophets Isaiah and Micah of the eighth century B.C., and Jeremiah and Ezekiel of the seventh and sixth centuries respectively. Micah complains bitterly of the rulers of the house of Israel, who pluck the very skin from off the people and the flesh from the bones, who build up Zion with blood, Jerusalem with iniquity.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah bids the nation to bring no more vain oblations: Yahweh hates the new moons, the incense, and the appointed festivals: what He requires is what Israel will not do. 'Wash you, make you clean . . . cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'<sup>3</sup>

Let us try to understand these Israelites and their frame of mind. Most of us on reading the Old Testament are wont to think that the prophets had to deal with people of exceptional

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hos. ii. 11-13; iv. 1-13; vii. 1-7; Amos ii. 6-8; iv. 1-5; vi. 1-6, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Mic. iii. 2, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Is. i. 13, 14, 16, 17; cf. iii. 12-16; v. 8-12; Mic. vi. 10-12, etc.

moral blindness and of crass stupidity, with people who refused to learn this simplest lesson of elementary religion—that God will never accept ritual as a substitute for a moral life. But it is entirely unfair to judge them as though they had stood in the full noon-tide of modern enlightenment. After all they were living up to the standards of their own day ; they were doing what every other Semitic nation would have done ; they were serving Yahweh according to the most approved methods ; why should these things be pleasing to Chemosh or Baal, but not to Yahweh ? The consensus of opinion, the custom of the whole world, as well as the weight of numbers within their own ranks, was entirely on the side of the people and against the prophets. It was not the ignorant and foolish alone, but the recognised leaders of the religious life of the nation who supported this course—the kings, very many of the priests, and above, all, numbers of prophets, who came forward and claimed to be entrusted with a message from Yahweh in precisely the same way as those whom we call the ‘ true ’ prophets.<sup>1</sup>

We have no right to condemn these Hebrews

<sup>1</sup> See also below, pp. 70-77.

as wholly degenerate or as hardened hypocrites. The fact is that it could not have been an easy matter for any of them to see that an Isaiah or a Jeremiah was right, and that many another prophet who gave a different counsel was wrong. There was so much in the general atmosphere of thought, in the inherited prejudices, and ways of looking at things which was entirely in favour of the so-called 'false' prophets, and against the views of the 'true' prophets, that we cannot wonder if the 'false' were listened to more often than the 'true.'<sup>1</sup>

But all this goes to show quite clearly that had it not been for the 'true' prophets and their party, there would have been nothing to distinguish the race and religion of Israel from any other of the Semitic states of Palestine, from the Moabites or the Ammonites. The theory and practice of religion in Israel, apart from the influence of these prophets, was plainly developing in the same direction and subject to the same conditions as those which prevailed in Moab or Ammon. And like the religions of Moab and Ammon, it would have perished, leaving scarcely a trace behind, had it not been for the work of

<sup>1</sup> For an example, see below, pp. 74-77.

these prophets. The creation and preservation of all the noble religious literature of Israel, the propagation of the great truths, which have made Israel 'a light unto the Gentiles,' and even the continued existence of the national life itself, were due to the mono-Yahwist prophets and their party.

Now there is one important conclusion to be drawn from these facts. If we want to discover the origin of the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew prophets, there is no use looking to the national character or the national genius for an explanation. The national character and genius of the Hebrews were plainly of the same warp and woof which were common to all the Semitic nations. The prophets are not the leading exponents of a national movement towards monotheism; between them and the course of development of the religious life and thought of the people, there was not merely opposition, there was contradiction, persecution, a life and death struggle.

And so in seeking for the causes of the Hebrew monotheism we have to look for something which was peculiar to the prophets, to a mere handful in each generation. And we have to ask ourselves

what it can have been which made this handful of Hebrews believe that their national God was the one and only God, while every one else believed Him to be one among many others, which caused them, in spite of the polytheistic atmosphere in which they were born and bred, to cling to this monotheism as to life itself.



## CHAPTER V

### WHENCE DID THE PROPHETS DERIVE THEIR BELIEF ? NOT FROM REASON

HAVING thus obtained some insight into the nature of the Hebrew monotheism, we must now go on to take up the question, whence was it derived ? How did the Hebrew prophets come by this belief ?

It will be well to begin by asking whether it could have been the same kind of process of observation and reflection which led to the monotheistic belief of the Greek philosophers. Did the Hebrew prophets have a different conception of causation, *i.e.* the way in which things happen in nature, from that which prevailed among the polytheists ? Was it reflection upon this new conception of causation which led them to abandon the old polytheism, and then brought them, in their efforts to find an explanation of the world, to the idea that there is but one

Almighty Person, to whom alone the name of God is due ?

To this question there can be but one answer, and that a negative answer. In the first place, causation was to the mono-Yahwists precisely what it was to the polytheists—the immediate intervention of a personal will. Of course, the thought that one natural event can succeed another without any one stepping in to make it do so was not unknown among either the polytheists or the mono-Yahwists. Some impressive events are so constantly associated together in nature that the mind learns to think of them together, and the first is taken as a sign that the second is sure to follow, as in the case of the east wind which brought the locusts and the west wind which blew them away.<sup>1</sup> But beyond this, where the natural sequence of events had not vividly impressed itself upon the mind, the polytheists and the mono-Yahwists alike supposed that the result was due to the exercise of will-power on the part of an unseen being.

Between the polytheists and the mono-Yahwists, however, there was this very important difference : whereas the polytheists saw a multi-

<sup>1</sup> Ex. x. 13, 19.

tude of conflicting wills behind the workings of nature, the prophets saw but one—the Almighty and All-Holy will of Yahweh, the God of Israel. The prophetic idea seems to have been that the created objects which compose the visible universe were each endowed with sufficient intelligence to be able to receive the commands of Yahweh and to act upon them. Those phenomena of nature which can be counted on to recur at regular intervals, such as the succession of the seasons, were thought of as the standing orders which Yahweh issued to His creatures; and as these orders could be altered or reversed at any time to suit His purposes, the Hebrews found no difficulty in imagining the most startling contradictions of the normal course of things as about to take place in the future, or as having taken place in the remote past. But every event which could not be counted on to recur at regular intervals, no matter how familiar a phenomenon of everyday life it might be, was held to be due to the immediate intervention of Yahweh, who there and then caused it to happen in this way.

Let us take a few examples to illustrate these points. Jeremiah speaks of certain ‘ordinances

of the harvest,' 'ordinances of the moon and stars,' 'ordinances of heaven and earth.'<sup>1</sup> These ordinances or regular recurrences of phenomena are not 'natural' laws, but rather 'statutes' or rules of conduct laid down for the guidance of living beings; the Hebrew words here translated 'ordinances,' being used over and over again for the 'statutes' and 'judgements' which Yahweh has given to Israel to follow. Yahweh issues His commands and His creatures obey.

'He saith to the snow, Fall thou on the earth;  
Likewise to the shower of rain.'<sup>2</sup>

He covereth his hands with the lightning,  
And giveth it a charge that it strike the mark.'<sup>3</sup>

He commands the sun not to rise,<sup>4</sup> and the clouds not to rain.<sup>5</sup> He rebukes the sea and it is dried up.<sup>6</sup> He commands and raises the stormy wind.<sup>7</sup> In just the same way He commanded the ravens to feed Elijah,<sup>8</sup> and the great fish to vomit out Jonah.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jer. v. 24; xxxi. 34, 35; xxxiii. 25; cf. Job xxxviii. 33; Ps. cxlviii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Job xxxvii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Job xxxvi. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Job ix. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Is. v. 6; cf. Ps. lxxviii. 23, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Nahum i. 4; Ps. cvi. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. cvii. 25.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings xvii. 4; cf. xvii. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Jonah ii. 10; cf. Amos ix. 3.

Of events which do not happen at regular intervals, those which, like the last two noticed above, are rare and astonishing, are, of course, ascribed to Yahweh's intervention; but more than that, events which are neither rare nor astonishing, but matters of everyday familiarity, were in precisely the same way ascribed to Yahweh's direct command. The thunder is the 'voice' of Yahweh,<sup>1</sup> the wind is 'sent forth' by Yahweh, as also the ice, cold, and snow.<sup>2</sup> Drought, famine, pestilence, sickness, and the depredations of wild beasts are always signs of Yahweh's anger.<sup>3</sup> In the case of death, a man may be killed in battle, or he may die of old age; but otherwise he dies because Yahweh has smitten him.<sup>4</sup> And again in the course of human history, it is Yahweh who stirs up enemies against His people, and gives the victory now to one side and now to the other as best suits His purposes.<sup>5</sup>

It is plain then that the name of 'Yahweh' stood in the mind of the Hebrew prophet for the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxix. 3-9; lxxvii. 18, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxlvii. 16, 17; Job xxxvii. 10, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. iii. 2, 3; xiv. 12; Amos iv. 9; Ez. xiv. 21; 2 Kings xvii. 25; 2 Sam. xii. 15, etc.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Sam. xxvi. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. v. 25; x. 5-19; Jer. i. 15; xviii. 6; 1 Sam. xxvi. 19; xxx. 23.

cause of all that he saw taking place about him, in heaven above and in the earth beneath, in the affairs of individuals and of nations, alike in matters commonplace and extraordinary. His was the omnipresent, omniscient will which ceaselessly, universally, and immediately intervened in a thousand places at once to make things happen in such a way as to accomplish His moral purposes. Where we see the operation of 'natural law' and 'secondary causes,' the mono-Yahwists saw the vivid mental life of Yahweh and His irresistible will at work; and again, where the polytheists saw a multitude of conflicting wills, the Hebrew prophets saw but one, the Almighty will of Yahweh.

Causation, then, meant essentially the same thing to the mono-Yahwists as it did to the polytheists—the immediate action of a personal will; and if further proof be needed that the prophetic belief in one Almighty God could not have arisen out of a more accurate knowledge of the facts of nature, two considerations may be adduced. In the first place, the mono-Yahwists have given us a description of the origin of the world; but their account is plainly not based upon a prolonged and careful inquiry into the facts of

nature ; if modern science is right, the science of the mono-Yahwists is wrong.<sup>1</sup> The recent discovery of the Babylonian accounts of the creation enable us to see what the mono-Yahwists did when they wrote the early chapters of Genesis : they took the stock of ideas about the world and its origin, which was more or less the common property of the Semitic nations, and wrote it up in the light of their own belief that Yahweh is the only God ; they took the best natural science which the ancient world knew and edited it in their own way, purging it of all its puerilities and of every trace of polytheism, and substituting therefor their own lofty ideas of Yahweh and His character. Their belief about Yahweh could not have been the result of a closer insight into the processes of the natural world ; they already had that belief firmly fixed in their minds, and in the light of it they re-wrote the ancient tales of how the world was made. So far as natural science is concerned, the first chapters of Genesis belong to the ancient world and the polytheistic stage of culture ; where they differ from the ancients is in the fact that they substitute a pure ethical monotheism for the

<sup>1</sup> See Driver, *Genesis*, pp. 19-33.

belief in a host of deities constantly at variance with each other.

In the second place, the discovery of the universality of natural causation broke up the ancient polytheism, but it did not of itself suffice to introduce a monotheistic faith ; that came only as the result of a long process of reasoning, of argument and reflection. If the world was not made by the gods, how did it come into being ? What is the original substance out of which it is constituted ? How did all these complicated differences arise ? Is the world ultimately material or spiritual ? Was it created, or did it happen by chance, or did it create itself ? These are some of the problems with which the philosophers had to deal, and some answered them in one way and some in another. Those who were called monotheists, or rather theists, had to maintain in opposition to others that the ultimate nature of existence was spiritual and personal, and that all has come from the will and mind of one Almighty Self-existent Being. This realm of philosophical discussion and metaphysical speculation is one which has unmistakable characteristics of its own ; it deals with the problems of the nature and meaning



of existence ; it has nothing to do with the relative power and moral characters of the gods worshipped by the polytheists.

Now when we turn to the Old Testament and the writings of the prophets we find that this whole world of philosophical thought is entirely absent. These are not the questions and the arguments with which the prophets are concerned ; they say nothing of the problem of existence and know nothing of the distinction between spiritual and material ; this is a realm into which they have never entered. What they are concerned with, as has been said above, is an entirely different matter ; all their efforts are bent upon asserting that there is no God but this God Yahweh, and that He is of a morally upright character ; they are concerned with the power and character of a particular divine Being, not with discovering an answer to the problem of how the world came to be what it is. One may be quite certain then that whatever the origin of the Hebrew monotheism, it certainly was not the same as that of the Greek monotheism, and that it involved a very different mental process.

Is it possible then that mono-Yahwism can

have sprung from the contemplation of the facts of history, from the thought of the great deeds which Yahweh has done for Israel in the past ? It is, of course, easy for us who look back and see the part which Israel has played in the religious history of man to say that they were under the special providence of Almighty God. But that is not the point with which we now have to deal. The question is whether any one of that age, who set out from the naïve assumptions of his day regarding the relations subsisting between gods and men, would have come, by a study of the facts of Israel's history, to the conclusion that Yahweh is the only and Almighty God.

Now, it was the common belief of the ancient world that, a god and his people being linked together in one social organism, their success or failure as a nation was an index to his powers as a god. If Israel had subdued the whole world, there would have been no escape from the conclusion that Yahweh was Almighty, and that there was none beside Him. But the facts of history were other than this ; and the strictest logic compelled men to believe that there were many other gods more powerful than Yahweh.

The correct logical conclusion from the inherited prejudices of the day, in combination with the facts of history, was drawn by those who opposed the mono-Yahwists. The refugees in Egypt replied to Jeremiah that they would continue 'to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem ; for then had we plenty of victuals and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.' <sup>1</sup> Rabshakeh, again, knew well that Hezekiah and the Jews on the wall of Jerusalem would understand the force of his argument when he said, 'Who are they among all the gods of these countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand ?' <sup>2</sup>

If the study of history had been the source of the prophets' conviction that there is no god but Yahweh, they would surely have attempted to

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xliv. 17, 18.

■ Isa. xxxvi. 20.

convince their contemporaries by calling attention to the same line of reasoning which had convinced themselves. Instead of emphatic assertion and symbolic action they would have used argument and appealed to the facts. But although they frequently refer to the past and to the great deeds Yahweh has done for Israel, sometimes as an act of praise and sometimes as an exhortation to obedience or for other purposes, they very seldom make use of the appeal to history to prove that there is but one God ; and the passages in which this argument is found<sup>1</sup> are later in date than the earliest appearance of the monotheistic belief. One may then feel quite confident that the origin of mono-Yahwism does not lie here. Indeed, when we keep in mind the fire and enthusiasm of the prophets, their fierce denunciations and the storms of feeling which swept through their souls, we cannot help seeing that no mere cold logic, no careful calculation of the lessons of the past, could have produced such results as these. The thoughts to which the prophets gave utterance had been branded in upon their souls in moments of intensest feeling, and no amount

<sup>1</sup> Deut. iv. 34-40 ; vii. 6, 9.

of opposition or persecution could ever compel them to change.

We now come to inquire into the origin of the ethical element in mono-Yahwism. And first of all, it is very necessary to understand clearly just what is meant by that ethical element. It is a mistake to suppose that the prophets taught people that their ideas about right and wrong were altogether false, and that they must learn to call wrong what they had hitherto called right and *vice versa*. They presuppose that men are quite well able to distinguish correctly between right and wrong; their point is that the people of Israel have been doing what they know to be wrong, and they exhort them to live up to what they know to be right. It is only perversity and depravity which can 'call evil good and good evil.'<sup>1</sup> In a word, the prophets were not reformers of the theory of moral conduct, but of its practice. And their peculiarity lies in the ground on which they urge men to live up to the commonly accepted standard of right conduct. That ground is the moral character of Yahweh. Yahweh, they say, will never look with favour upon His

<sup>1</sup> Isa. v. 20.

people so long as they are guilty of the immoral conduct which disgraced the history of Israel, the murder, theft, cheating, drunkenness, perjury, and adultery, and above all, the perversion of justice and the bitter oppression of the poor and unprotected. The prophets are never weary of declaring that Yahweh hates and abhors these things, and that if they continue nothing but calamity and destruction awaits the nation. Yahweh's character is such, they say, that no amount of offerings, however rich and rare, no number of festivals, however brilliant they may be, will avail to stem His anger or avert punishment. What He requires from His people as the first condition of His favour is a moral regeneration.

It is just this which was unique in the ancient world. None of the other gods were like Yahweh in this respect; they were willing to be propitiated by sacrifice and offering, and put ritual before morality. Accordingly, our problem is to discover why the mono-Yahwists believed so firmly that Yahweh the God of Israel would never be pleased with His people, unless in their national life they reflected a righteousness akin to His own.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 20-23; 42-44.

Could they have arrived at this conviction by reflection upon the facts of existence? There are some of us who, seeing that things are so ordered in this world that in the long run virtue is rewarded and vice is punished, have come to the conclusion that the Power which has ordered things thus must have a care for morality. But this was scarcely possible for the prophets because they did not see that nature is an organic whole, nor, as was seen above, were they in the habit of reflecting upon the course and constitution of the world in general. And besides this, such Psalms as the thirty-seventh and the seventy-third, and such works as the book of Job<sup>1</sup> indicate that to many of the mono-Yahwists the wicked seemed to prosper and the good to suffer, and that this offered a serious problem.

There are, however, many writers who appear to think that the cause of the prophetic belief in Yahweh as a God of morality must be sought in the political history of the day. They say that the enemies of Israel stood at her gates and destruction overshadowed her; obviously, then, Yahweh was angry with His people and was punishing them for their wickedness. But an

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jer. xii. 1-2.

explanation of this kind is no explanation at all, because it overlooks the one point which really needs explanation. National disaster was to every ancient nation a certain proof of the anger of the national god, and was always regarded as a punishment. But whereas every other ancient people, and large numbers within the nation of Israel itself, said that the punishment was for some ritual error or for some failure to yield to the god some offering on which he had set his heart, the prophets maintained that Yahweh punished Israel for none of these things, but only because of her evil moral life. Why should the prophets have singled out moral evil as the one cause of the anger while all others assigned it to some failure to carry out the ceremonial properly ?

Moreover, this argument assumes that at the moment when this belief first appeared, the people of Israel were in sore straits. But this was not the case. When Amos and Hosea prophesied the Northern Kingdom had never before been so prosperous or strong. It is true that the Assyrians were gathering their armies to hurl them against their neighbours, but so long as the mighty power of Egypt remained unbroken, it



was by no means a foregone certainty that the Assyrians would prove invincible.

And once more, one must question whether the history of Israel really did teach this lesson in an unmistakable and unequivocal manner. Sometimes the prophets did point to days when justice had gone hand in hand with prosperity,<sup>1</sup> and the compilers of the national history were always eager to point out how the 'good' kings had prospered and the 'evil' kings had suffered; but there can be no doubt that these writers approached the history with a conviction of Yahweh's supreme interest in morality already firmly fixed in their minds; and it was only natural that they should seek for and emphasise those facts of history which confirmed their pre-conceived ideas. But the question is whether any one, who did not already believe in it, would be sure to find the history of Israel so eloquent of Yahweh's moral character as to leave no doubt whatever in his mind about it. There were, of course, very many periods in which prosperity and social justice coincided; and there were others in which adversity and immorality appeared together; but this combination was by no means

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxii. 15, 16.

invariable. Josiah, one of the best of the kings, met a miserable defeat in battle against the Egyptians, and the very worst corruption was coupled to a period of great prosperity in the days of Jeroboam II. The facts of life, whether in the case of individuals or in that of nations, are seldom so clearly ordered as to beget an unshakable and unquestioning conviction that wrong doing will certainly bring punishment and righteousness a reward. The history of Israel is no exception to this rule, and accordingly it is altogether unlikely that this could have been the source of the prophetic belief.

In Chapter III. we saw that in several particulars the theology of the Hebrew monotheists was at one with that of the polytheists. The present chapter has shown that in intellectual power, in their knowledge of the facts and processes of the natural world, in their capacity for abstract thought and reflection, they do not advance much beyond the general level of their contemporaries. The secret of their belief in one Almighty and All-Holy God is not to be found in any vastly superior mental gifts. They were not philosophers in disguise, but children of their own unreflecting age. They were born

and bred in the atmosphere of polytheism, under conditions which to all their contemporaries made polytheism to appear to be the only credible form of religion. And if they rejected that polytheism and clung to a spiritual and ethical monotheism, with all the tenacity of an overpowering conviction, this was not due to any intellectual process of reasoning, but, as will be seen in Chapter VII., to religious experiences of an altogether extraordinary kind. In order, however, to be able to make this point clear when we come to it, it will be necessary to devote the next chapter to the subject of prophets and their prophesyings.

## CHAPTER VI

### PROPHETS AND PROPHESYING

SOME people are accustomed to think of prophets simply as men who foretold the future. And this they very often did do. But the more important thing about them is that they claimed to speak, and were believed to speak, with divine authority; *i.e.* they were, for the time being, the mouthpieces of divine spirits who used them to communicate messages to men. They were not so much 'fore-tellers' as 'forth-tellers.' And the really interesting and important problem about them is not why they were sometimes right and sometimes wrong in what they foretold, but rather what was it about these particular men which caused both them and their contemporaries to be so firmly convinced that the words they spoke were the words of a Divine Being? And a second interesting question on which we

shall have to touch in the next chapter is, what explanation can be given of the origin or genesis of the prophetic messages? It will be seen that the answer to both these problems lies in the peculiar religious experiences through which these men passed.

In approaching these questions, and especially the first, we must try to put ourselves back into the era of the prophets and see things with the eyes of the people of that day. And first of all, it is necessary to remember that there were prophets, or men of the same kind as the prophets, in practically every ancient religion.<sup>1</sup> All the world over, there were persons who were believed to be used by divine spirits to communicate their messages to men. The god took possession of the man for the time being, dislodged his human spirit from its place of control, and used the man's physical organs of speech for his own purposes. It was not the man, but the god who was speaking.

And if we ask on what grounds people believed this, the answer is that all forms of unusual behaviour, such as frenzy, madness, ecstasy, epilepsy, hysteria, together with dreams, hallu-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jer. xxvii. 3, 9.

inations, visions, and auditions were always ascribed to the visitation of some unseen spirit. Human nature, it was thought, did not of itself produce such conditions as these : the man was not master of himself ; he was ' possessed ' by some spirit or god. And accordingly, the words to which he gave utterance when in one of these abnormal conditions were regarded as the words of the spirit who possessed him ; and the more abnormal the state was, the more evident did it become that the real speaker was not the man but the spirit. It was characteristic of the ancient world to explain these phenomena in this way, for no other explanation seems to have occurred to them.

When we come to the great prophets of the Old Testament we expect to find something different ; and so we do, but we cannot grasp that difference until we see how much there was in common between Hebrew and other prophecy. In the first place then, we must notice that there were many prophets in Israel who claimed to be prophets of Yahweh, and spoke in His name, but who cannot be distinguished in any way from the prophets of other gods. Not all the Hebrew prophets taught that the national

God of Israel was almighty and all-holy ; there were large numbers who, like the mass of the people, believed Him to be one among many others and of an indifferent moral character. And these men were plainly of the same type, and called prophets for the same reason that men in other nations were,—because they were subject to abnormal states of mind which both to themselves and to their audiences guaranteed their inspiration. They are often called the ‘false’ prophets ; but if we apply this term, we do so only because we now know that they were teaching a false view of Yahweh’s character and power, not because they were conscious impostors or deliberate liars. Some of them may have lied on occasions ; but they were undoubtedly perfectly sincere and acting in good faith when they claimed to be inspired by Yahweh. According to the ideas of their time, they had the best of reasons for thinking that it was so. We see an instance of this in the case of Saul who, when the spirit of God came upon him, ‘stripped off his clothes, and he also prophesied before Samuel, and lay down naked all that day and all that night.’<sup>1</sup> And, again,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xix. 23, 24 ; cf. 1 Kings xviii. 19, 26, 29.

another though slightly different case is that of Balaam.<sup>1</sup>

Of the same type was the prophesying of the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, who leaped and cried aloud and cut themselves with knives and lances, till the blood gushed upon them, and prophesied till the evening.<sup>2</sup> But this was prophecy at its lowest. It is a soberer and better thing when the prophet speaks words intelligible to all, and apparently in moments when the divine afflatus was not directly upon him. And this was apparently the case with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Yahweh who opposed Micaiah-ben-Imlah before King Ahab ; though here again it is quite clear from the course of the narrative that the basis of the prophesying was the visitation of a divine spirit.<sup>3</sup>

And the same thing is true of the mono-Yahwist prophets also : the reason why they and their hearers were so confident that Yahweh had inspired them was because they had passed through moments of extraordinary and intense mental

<sup>1</sup> Num. xxii. 38 ; xxiii. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings xviii. 19, 26, 29.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings xxii.



disturbance. There are several points which may be urged in proof of this. In the first place, it is a profound mistake to imagine that the minds of the 'true' prophets were scenes of quiet reflection and cool calculation, while those of the false were filled with confusion and subject to violent emotional storms. There is scarcely a page of their written prophecies which does not witness to the passionate feelings which vexed the souls of the mono-Yahwists; and it was these abnormal states of mind which convinced them that Yahweh was communicating His will to them. 'Mine heart within me is broken, all my bones shake,' says Jeremiah, 'I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome; because of Yahweh and His holy words.' <sup>1</sup>

When the Israelites saw the two classes of prophets confronting each other with contradictory messages, there was little or nothing, apart from their exhortations, to distinguish them from each other. Both made use of the same introductory formulas: 'Thus saith Yahweh,' <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxiii. 9, cf. 28; xx. 7-13; Amos iii. 4-8; Micah iii. 8; Isa. viii. 11; Ezek. iii. 14, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xxviii. 2, etc.

‘the burden of Yahweh,’<sup>1</sup> or, ‘the oracle of Yahweh.’<sup>2</sup>

The mono-Yahwists again are not distinguished by the display of superior reasoning powers or of deeper reflection. Both sides used the same methods of arguing; both attempted to overbear their adversaries by sheer weight of assertion, and both employed striking symbolic actions to impress their words upon the people. For instance, when Jeremiah appeared before King Zedekiah with a yoke of wood upon his neck to enforce his message of submission to Babylon, Hananiah, a ‘false’ prophet, took the yoke and broke it saying, ‘Thus saith Yahweh, even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar . . . within two full years.’<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah’s reply is to replace the yoke of wood with one of iron; ‘for thus saith Yahweh, . . . I have put a yoke of iron upon all these nations that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar.’<sup>4</sup>

The ‘true’ prophets did not deny that Yahweh communicated messages to men in ways akin to those in which the ‘false’ prophets claimed to have received them. Amos directly asserts that

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxiii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xiii. 7; Jer. xxiii. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. xxviii. 10, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. xxviii. 14.

Yahweh does nothing, but He communicates his secrets to His servants the prophets.<sup>1</sup> They do not take the line that their own words, being based upon a reasoned judgment, are more worthy of trust than those of the false prophets whose teaching is merely the outcome of religious experience and overheated fancy. They know that their own messages are, like those of the false prophets, based on religious experience; and since the false prophets prophesy a different message, there must be something wrong about the experiences of those false prophets. Sometimes they say that Yahweh has purposely sent a lying spirit to visit and deceive them;<sup>2</sup> and at others that the visions and dreams of their adversaries proceed out of their own heart; they are false visions and lying dreams.<sup>3</sup> One thing of which Jeremiah was perfectly certain was that no one could have stood in the council of Yahweh, *i.e.* have held real inner communion with Him, and yet at the same time preach peace and safety to a people who set ritual above morality.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Amos iii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings xxii. 20-24; Ezek. xiv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. xxiii. 16, 21, 25, 27; Ezek. xiii. 2-10, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. xxiii. 18, 22.

The average Israelite must have found it exceedingly difficult to decide as to who was right and who was wrong. Both the 'true' and the 'false' prophets were thoroughly convinced that Yahweh had spoken to them and not to their opponents; both used the same methods, and both were recognised as prophets. The great difference was this, that the prophecy of a Jeremiah, for instance, was dictated by a conviction that Yahweh is Almighty and requires righteousness from His people, and will not be favourable to them till they are thoroughly purged from their former iniquities; but Hananiah's policy implied that Yahweh's goodwill would soon be once more turned towards them, even though the moral reformation was as far off as ever. Hananiah's belief about Yahweh was just that which was held by the polytheists in Israel, and out of it as well; hence it requires no special explanation.

There was nothing new or difficult to explain in his message. He was simply giving utterance in the name of Yahweh to thoughts and beliefs about Yahweh which were the common property of all the polytheists and which had long dwelt in his own heart. But the messages of Jeremiah and his fellow mono-Yahwists were startlingly

new and strangely incredible to the men of that day. As will be seen more clearly below, the source of that new and incredible element is to be found in the peculiar nature of certain religious states of mind through which they passed. And so one cannot be surprised if people found it difficult to decide between a Jeremiah and his 'false' opponent; for the differences between them were based upon differences in those secret inner mental recesses where each enjoyed, or believed that he enjoyed, intercourse with Yahweh, the God of Israel.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHENCE DID THE PROPHETS DERIVE THEIR BELIEF ? FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

WE now come to discuss the origin or genesis of the messages as they were formed in the minds of the prophets. And yet what we want to inquire into is not why just these particular words were chosen rather than any others of similar import, but why the substance of the messages of the true prophets differed so often from that of the 'false.' What we really want to find out is why, if both drew their inspiration from religious experience, one class of prophets was so firmly convinced that Yahweh is Almighty and will never be favourable to His people so long as they persist in immorality, while the others were just as firmly convinced that He is merely a characteristic Semitic deity. It was this difference of conviction which caused the 'true' and the 'false' prophets to contradict

each other so often ; they brought to bear upon the political and social conditions of the day fundamentally different ideas of Yahweh's power and purposes ; hence, the counsel of the one side often stood in violent opposition to that of the other.

And so we come at last to the question which has been raised and postponed so often before, How did these Hebrew prophets come to believe so firmly in the Almighty power and in the moral holiness of Yahweh ? And since we now turn to examine their religious experiences, we shall at last be able to give a positive answer to the question.

There is one prophet who has left a description, albeit a meagre one, of a certain state of consciousness through which he passed, and which he attributed to the immediate presence of Yahweh, the God of Israel.<sup>1</sup> What he says of this state of mind enables us to understand from a purely psychological point of view how he came to be so firmly convinced of Yahweh's supreme sovereignty and righteousness. The question of the ultimate cause of this state of consciousness must be left

<sup>1</sup> This and the following pages are taken from *The People of God*, vol. i.

on one side for the present. It must have been experienced, else it could not have been described; and once experienced it must issue in those two beliefs. The experience in question is narrated in the sixth chapter of Isaiah.

It should be noted first, that the prophet does not lose consciousness; on the contrary, he becomes acutely conscious. He is filled with the thought of himself, and that because he feels himself sharply distinguished from and contrasted with another Personality. He is conscious that his personality is being measured by a standard which is so much greater than he can attain to that the two appear quite incommensurable. This vivid sense of personal inadequacy brings with it the feeling of an intense strain, more than human life can endure. 'Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King Yahweh of Hosts.'

Isaiah felt his life to be in danger. 'Woe is me!' he cries, 'I perish.' The intensity of the feeling to which this cry witnesses may be brought out by the force of two contrasts. The superstitious dread that death will ensue upon contact



with certain objects, or if certain mental phenomena are experienced, is a familiar feature in the life of primitive man. In such cases there is an anticipation that death will shortly follow ; and such an anticipation of approaching death is perhaps to be discerned in what is told us of Gideon and of Manoah, both of whom are described as in fear that death will result from the experience through which they have passed.<sup>1</sup> But this interpretation cannot be put upon the experience of Isaiah. The cry that he is perishing is wrung from him at the moment when the feeling is at its height. It is not a presentiment of future death ; it is the expression of a feeling that the bonds which unite soul and body are even now about to burst asunder. Again, when a man has a feeling that death is rapidly approaching, it is in many cases due to the fact that his powers are gradually failing him ; the sensations he receives through the natural channels grow weaker and weaker ; consciousness becomes thin and pale ; he feels that his powers are dying out one by one ; he becomes less and less conscious of himself until the feeble flame flickers out. In such cases, it is the gradual waning of

<sup>1</sup> Judges vi. 22-23 ; xiii. 22.

consciousness which causes the apprehension of death. But in the case of Isaiah, as has been seen, consciousness did not wane. What causes his apprehension is the very vividness of his consciousness, the nakedness with which he sees his soul contrasted against another Personality. If death is sometimes apprehended because consciousness is felt to be dying out, in this case death is apprehended because consciousness is passing the bounds of life in the opposite direction. It is becoming so acute and so intense, the sense of strain and inability to cope with the situation is so severe, that the prophet feels that soul and body are on the point of being torn apart.

No man can pass through such a moment and remain unchanged. The content of that state of mind must always remain for him the most real thing in the world, that by reference to which he will interpret all his varied experiences of life. At such a moment his mind receives a bent, has impressed upon it a certain set of axioms, as it were, from which his thinking never escapes. In writing of experiences which, from a psychological point of view, are the same in kind with those of Isaiah, Professor W. James says :

‘They are as convincing to those who have

them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are. One may indeed be entirely without them ; probably more than one of you here present is without them in any marked degree ; but if you do have them, and have them at all strongly, the probability is that you cannot help regarding them as genuine perceptions of truth, as revelations of a kind of reality which no adverse argument, however unanswerable by you in words, can expel from your belief.' <sup>1</sup>

But to return to the particular case under discussion, Isaiah understood that the cause of his experience was the immediate presence of Yahweh the God of Israel. It was inevitable, therefore, that to him the Personality of Yahweh should be the most real thing in existence. He might have doubts on anything else, but the intense moment of his 'call' could not allow him for an instant to question the efficacy and the reality of the presence of Yahweh. From Him there could be no escape. His power could know

<sup>1</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 72 f. ; see also the whole of Lecture III. pp. 53-77 ; cf. also for another interesting illustration from a different source, Ramsay's *Education of Christ*, pp. 9-11.

no limits. His Personality must fill up the prophet's whole mental horizon. Other gods, who had never been the cause of such moments, must sink into insignificance; indeed, the mere wood and stone with which they were identified would be felt to be incapable of giving rise to moments of such intensity or of exercising any real influence on human hearts or human affairs. With the unreflecting idea of causation which was current in those days, one can well understand how a man who underwent such an experience would see the personal will of Yahweh behind every event which happened, rather than a multitude of conflicting and independent wills; other wills would not have for him any effective existence. 'The foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried and the house was filled with smoke.' In a moment the prophet is filled with a sense that he is in a presence infinitely higher than that of man; he himself and his human origin and nature stand out in contradistinction to this Divine Personality: 'Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' The seraphic song, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is Yahweh of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory,' was

but the echo of the feeling which was throbbing through the prophet's soul ; had he never heard the words his conclusion would have been the same.

In this experience, then, there is a sufficient psychological explanation of the origin of the first principle of mono-Yahwism, that Yahweh is the one and only divine Being. And the second principle, that He is righteous, was also derived from the same source. The prophet Isaiah, it was pointed out, experienced an intense feeling of personal inadequacy ; he felt himself to be measured against another Person and to come short. On one side stood Yahweh in unapproachable holiness and majesty, and on the other stood the prophet himself and his fellows : ' Woe is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.' <sup>1</sup> The immediate result was a feeling of intense personal unworthiness, a sense of sin and of guilt which must be removed. ' Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged.' <sup>2</sup>

A deep sense of guilt is found in the Babylonian Psalms ; but this feeling follows upon disaster.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. vi. 7.

The individual or the nation is in trouble and feels the wrath of some god pursuing him. Hence the expression of a deep penitence, and the anxious desire to please the deity. But, as was pointed out above, the feeling of sin which Isaiah experiences is not occasioned by an overwhelming calamity. It is the very presence of Yahweh which fills him with this awful consciousness of his own unworthiness. It is not that Yahweh is in a mood of angry indignation and needs to be placated ; it is Yahweh's very nature and character to be holy, because the mere contact with Him produces at once this feeling of human unworthiness and guilt. Here we have just that element which is so strikingly absent from other ancient religions—the subjective sense of personal unworthiness for the divine presence, a feeling of awe, or dread before God, which is not related in the prophetic mind to any one special sin, nor to the thought of divine vengeance or punishment, but is occasioned by the fact that the Person who is there, is what He is. Accordingly Isaiah could not but realise that Yahweh was Himself absolutely holy and righteous, the fountain-source of all purity and goodness, to whom all that can be called ' sin ' or ' iniquity ' must be repugnant.

His opposition to wrongdoing is not fitful and capricious ; it is the expression of His inmost Being, His permanent attitude towards men. And so to Isaiah, Yahweh becomes differentiated from all other gods as one whose character is known—known to be upright and just—known to be set against evil, and as a consequence it is certain that no immoral people can hope for His favour.

When Isaiah says that Yahweh is ‘holy,’ and he and his people are ‘unclean,’ he is expressing a feeling of general human infirmity and unworthiness before Yahweh. Yahweh is the absolute supreme sovereign Lord on whom all depend and to whose will all must bow ; He dwells in depths of effulgent purity, of which the only thing the prophet knows is that he himself and all his people are utterly unworthy to enter there. It would probably be a mistake to suppose that the two ideas of physical and moral purity were clearly distinguished in Isaiah’s mind. The purity and holiness of Yahweh no doubt implied freedom from all that the prophet had been brought up to regard as ‘unclean’ from a ritual point of view, as well as all that we should call morally wrong.

When we combine the probable effect of this experience upon the prophet's mind with the historical facts of his day, we have a satisfactory explanation of his teaching. Just as Isaiah had experienced Yahweh's infinite power in his inner soul, and therefore knew it to be both universal and irresistible, so also he had experienced Yahweh's holiness and knew it to be the very essence of His Being. As there could be no escape from Yahweh's power, so there could be no failure or diminution or wavering in Yahweh's purity and righteousness. His favour could never be towards a people who persist in violating those principles of righteousness and judgment which are the expression of His inmost Being. Those who imagine that Yahweh overlooks these things entirely misjudge His character. If they will not listen to the exhortations of Yahweh's messengers, it cannot be but that the face of Yahweh will be turned away from them and they will suffer the most just and terrible punishment.

That His people, so morally rotten in their national life, should approach His presence and lightly tread His courts, confident in the rich abundance of their sacrifices and cheerfully forgetful of their sins, could only be the more dis-



pleasing to Him, because it denied His essential purity and holiness and equated Him with the idols of other races. Nothing but repentance and moral reformation can avert His wrath.

It may be claimed, then, that in this experience of Isaiah we have that which will account for his peculiar teaching and activities. Are we justified in inferring that the other prophets also derived their doctrine from a similar source? Of this there cannot be much doubt. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for instance, prefixed to their prophecies an account of a religious experience, the same in kind with that of Isaiah. It is true that we do not find in their experiences all the features which are found in the case of Isaiah; both prophets felt themselves to be in the presence of a Personality of immense power, and are conscious that a task is being laid upon them, which they feel themselves utterly incapable of carrying out, until they receive strength from the same source from which the task comes. The note of personal moral unworthiness, however, does not find expression.<sup>1</sup> But it would be a mistake to conclude from the silence of the prophets that nothing of the kind had taken place. Both prophets relate

<sup>1</sup> Jer. i. ; Ezek. i.-iii. 14.

their experiences, not in order to give a full introspective account of all that passed in their minds, but to prove to their contemporaries that they had a right to speak in the name of Yahweh because He had visited them and commissioned them to do so.

Amos and Hosea, moreover, appeal to religious experience as the self-evident proof of the genuineness of their prophetic message;<sup>1</sup> there need then be no hesitation in accepting these experiences as the source of the substance of their message. And what is true of these prophets may be safely inferred of others; for the conditions are the same and the results are the same. The negative argument from silence is of no value here, because the presence of abnormal religious states of mind would be assumed in the case of every one who appeared in public as a prophet, and what has come down to us is a summary of their teaching rather than a detailed and analysed account of their mental life.

Not all the mono-Yahwists, of course, were prophets. Many of them were psalmists, compilers, editors, and law-givers. But the intellectual atmosphere of the whole Old Testa-

<sup>1</sup> Amos iii. 4-8; vii. 15; cf. Micah iii. 8.

ment, in the Pentateuch and historical books as well as in the prophets, is so plainly the same in kind with that of the prophets that one can scarcely doubt that the same results are due to the same causes, and that here, too, religious experience is the source of mono-Yahwism. The omnipotence and moral uprightness of Yahweh was impressed upon them also, although, perhaps owing to differences of psychical temperament, these experiences expressed themselves in activities other than those commonly called prophetic.

Before leaving this subject, it will be well to bring out a certain remarkable contrast between the religious experiences of the 'true' prophets and those of the 'false.' It is quite possible to give a perfectly natural explanation of the experiences of the 'false' prophets; but the same explanation will not apply to those of the true.

Like the mono-Yahwists, the 'false' prophets passed through moments of intense consciousness in which they were firmly convinced they had had intercourse with Yahweh. But this conviction is not of itself any sufficient proof that there was any one there outside their own minds

with whom they had real communion ; for we know now that by far the greater number of impressions which our senses receive in the course of normal life do not enter into our consciousness at the moment at which they are received ; they are stored up in memory, in what is called the 'sub-conscious mind,' and then suddenly, when we are least expecting them, they make themselves felt in consciousness with such vividness as to create in us the conviction that they have been imparted to us by some one outside ourselves. Secretly and noiselessly the sub-conscious mind has been at work upon the materials supplied to it by former experience of life, and then suddenly the results of this hidden process are pushed out, as it were, into consciousness from apparently nowhere, and at once the impression is created that they have been imparted or inspired by some unseen spiritual being. As a matter of fact, however, it was only our own mind at work all the time ; a sudden upheaval of its inner depths brought to light things which we did not know were there ; and so, that which had in reality been long preparing within our own minds, appears as a quite fresh communication from without.

Now this explanation is quite applicable to the experiences of the 'false' prophets. No new element is involved in their experiences which could not have been received in the normal course of life and stored up in the hidden recesses of the sub-conscious mind. The old polytheistic conception of the world is once more brought to light in a peculiarly vivid manner, and the circumstances and conditions of the day are seen in relation to it. The minds of the 'false' prophets in the normal course of life were perpetually being charged with impressions of the reality of the old polytheism, and so the old polytheism appears again in all its vigour.

But this is not the case with the mono-Yahwists. They, too, were brought up, like the 'false' prophets, in an atmosphere of polytheism; they, too, were subject to those conditions of thought and life in which the truth of polytheism was, by a hundred facts a day, being constantly impressed upon the sub-conscious mind. And yet their religious experiences reveal to them something which stands in complete contradiction to the ancient polytheism. It is impossible to represent the ethical monotheism of these prophets as being merely the

product of the hidden workings of their sub-conscious minds, simply because the world in which they lived could not have charged their sub-conscious minds with any impression of the truth of that monotheism. The sub-conscious mind could not be impressed by that which was not there to impress it. And so we must look for some other explanation of the experiences of the 'true' prophets; and this will be taken up in Chapter XI.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ORGANISATION OF THE JEWISH RELIGION UPON A MONOTHEISTIC BASIS

So far we have attempted to discover the origin of the Hebrew monotheism by purely scientific methods, by tracing back the sequence of natural cause and effect as far as we possibly can without any assumption as to whether there is a God or not. In a later chapter, this theistic explanation of existence will be definitely assumed, and then the results of the inquiry will be reviewed in the light of it. For the present, however, it will be worth while to stick to the purely scientific method and to observe some facts connected with the history of the Jewish religion in order that these also may be before us when we come to make our review in the light of a belief in God.

If then we look at the course of the development of Israel's religion from the standpoint of the scientific student of religious phenomena,

there are, in addition to the extraordinary religious experiences which have just been discussed, two remarkable and unique facts, the significance of which is often overlooked. The first of these facts is that this primitive Semitic religion, which for many centuries seems to have been composed mainly, if not entirely, of polytheists, came to be organised upon the basis of a definite ethical monotheism, and to hold up before the world a monotheistic belief as its official creed. This is the only instance known to history in which a primitive national religion stripped itself of all connection with polytheism and developed into a clear-cut, thorough-going monotheism. The second fact is that when this national religion had become clearly and firmly established upon this monotheistic basis, and when it had gathered to itself a collection of writings which included its laws, its system of religious ordinances, its books of devotion, and above all its national history traced back to the very beginning of things, so that its sense of its own continuity, its consciousness of itself as one and the same through the ages was fully established; when this result had been reached, it suddenly underwent another extraordinary re-



organisation and appeared in a new form, a form in which it soon ceased to be national and became universal. Here again we are face to face with something which is unique in the history of the religious life of man. Nowhere else did a national religion thus cease to be national and yet continue to be conscious of itself as one and the same throughout the ages ; for we must not forget that the Christian Church claimed to be the true successor of the old Israel and to be rightful heir to the Scriptures, to the promises made to the fathers, and to all the rights and privileges belonging to the chosen people of God. This second fact, however, must be reserved for a later chapter ; the present chapter deals with the first alone.

In the days of the Judges and the early monarchy there could have been but little to distinguish the religion of Israel from that of the other states of Palestine. The Hebrews themselves do not seem to have been conscious of any profound difference ; <sup>1</sup> each nation had its national god whose service formed the basis of the national organisation, each served its god in much the same way, and each knew that it had no part or

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IV.

lot in the favour of the other gods, unless indeed a political alliance were formed. Not till the eighth, or possibly the ninth centuries B.C., do we find clear and unmistakable evidence of a startling difference.<sup>1</sup> Certain prophets then appeared and certain ancient traditions were written down which maintained that the God of Israel is the only God, that He alone has created and governs the world, and that He demands as the first condition of His favour a moral upright life from His people Israel. Such was the message of the great prophets Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Micah in the eighth century B.C.

But as was seen above, their message fell on deaf ears. The great mass of the people remained upon the old polytheistic level, and continued to serve the national God as though He were one of the same class with the gods of Moab or Ammon. About the year 621 B.C. the first real attempt was made to reorganise the national religion, to sweep away all that was incompatible with the belief that the God of Israel was an Almighty

<sup>1</sup> I would not undertake to say that this difference did not exist at an earlier date, but merely that there is no clear and unmistakable evidence that it did exist at an earlier date. The earlier it is put, the stronger becomes the argument I am urging.

and a jealously righteous God, and to place the religious and moral life of the people upon this higher level. This was the work of the Deuteronomic reformers under King Josiah. But the attempt was premature. The people were plainly unwilling or unable to assimilate and live up to the views of the prophetic party. Under the kings who succeeded Josiah a terrible reaction set in ; not only was Yahweh worshipped with all the abuse and paraphernalia proper to a characteristic Semitic deity, but a host of other gods were served as well—the Chaldaean deities of heaven, the shadow of whose mailed fist was fast descending on the land and terrifying its inhabitants. The kings, with many of the prophets and priests and the mass of the people, went one way, the way of all the polytheists ; and Jeremiah and a handful of other mono-Yahwists went another. At last the blow fell. In 598, and again in 586 B.C., the great bulk of the population went to Babylonia into captivity. Jeremiah and a mere remnant alone remained behind. And even these, after quarrelling with each other, fled into Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. And so the national life was shattered and the Holy Land remained, barren, silent, ruined.

It was no uncommon thing in those days for a nation to be thus plucked up by the roots and cast down again in a distant and alien soil, and it was terribly efficient in accomplishing its object—the extinction of the national life. We have to remember that what gave to a nation its consciousness of itself as a nation was the fact that all united in the worship of a common national deity ; and that the worship of this god could not be properly carried on outside his own territory, outside the country belonging to his people. The surest way, therefore, to break the national spirit was to strike at the national religion. And the surest way to destroy the national religion was to transplant the people to another soil ; for it demonstrated the impotency of the national god, and it made it useless to continue to serve him ; for how could he hear in a land now far off ? With nothing to bind them together, the people soon lost all sense of belonging to each other, and began to serve the powers who governed their new homes ; in a generation or two they became assimilated to the population of the country where they settled, and the name of the national god was remembered no more.

This terrible blow now fell upon Israel. It is

quite certain that had it not been for the fact that the same extraordinary experiences which had made mono-Yahwists of Isaiah, Micah, and others, were continued even in Babylonia, the history and the religion of Israel would have come to an end. But Ezekiel and the great prophet, whose words are recorded in the second half of the book of Isaiah, were there to witness to the faith and to preserve the continuity of belief in the Almighty power and holiness of the God of Israel. The Exile acted as a purifying fire, refining the gold and purging out the dross ; or, rather, it was a powerful solvent, breaking up the nation into its natural constituents. All those who could not accept the prophetic message, who refused to think of Yahweh as anything but a characteristic Semitic deity, when released from a sense of duty to their nation, soon forgot Him and served the gods of Babylonia. When the call came to return in 537 B.C., and again in 445 B.C., a new generation had sprung up ; Jerusalem was now a ruined city and the Holy Land a strange and distant country ; consequently, it was only those who could feel some zeal for the great beliefs of the prophets who responded to the call. Thus the Exile broke the entail of the

old tradition of polytheistic belief and worship in Israel : when the captives returned, they returned trusting in the name of Yahweh, the one and only God, the absolutely righteous God.

Of course, there were many bitter disappointments and trials awaiting them, and many a dark day came when the higher faith seemed to be ready to disappear amid the darkness of the surrounding superstitions. But again there appeared great mono-Yahwist prophets as of old, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi ; and finally in 444 B.C., when Ezra read the Law in the ears of all the people, mono-Yahwism became the accepted and official creed of the whole nation. Any one who refused this was now a traitor and unworthy of the name of Israel. Henceforth there was once more but one level of belief in the national religion, and that the higher level. Many declined from it, but in doing so they declined from the national faith.

Much of the ceremonial law which Ezra promulgated may seem a weary waste of trivial regulations ; and yet, if we see it in its proper historic setting, it was at once a wonderful and a unique production. It was drawn up in all its parts with a view to perpetuating and expressing

the great truths that there is no God but Yahweh, and that Israel is His people and must serve Him in holiness and righteousness, *i.e.* by a moral life, and by avoiding the contamination of contact with the heathen. And so for the first and last time in history, an ancient national religion was lifted up from the rut of polytheism and placed upon a definite monotheistic basis, a result which was due directly to the continuation through so many centuries of those peculiar religious experiences which caused men to believe in Yahweh as an Almighty and All-holy God.

Ezra promulgated the law in the name of Moses, the first law-giver in Israel. It would be a great mistake to suppose that this was a deliberate deception. The promoters of the Law undoubtedly felt that it represented the true application of Mosaic principles to the conditions of their own day. And it is possible that much more of the first five books of the Bible comes from Moses than many critics are at present inclined to allow. But if any very great portion of it was actually written by Moses, we have to suppose that that Mosaic part was soon afterwards lost or forgotten, to be discovered many cen-

turies later. And so while Moses was certainly the founder of the Hebrew religion, and may himself have believed in Yahweh as the Almighty and Holy God, yet the organisation of that religion upon a permanent monotheistic basis did not take place till the fifth century B.C., some seven or eight hundred years after Moses.

We are apt to think of the Jews of the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era as a set of narrow-minded and exclusive bigots. Perhaps there was an unnecessary fierceness in the hatred wherewith they hated the Gentiles, and no doubt a large measure of pride, self-righteousness and hypocrisy came to fill the hearts of many of them. But when all this has been said, the Law did undoubtedly stand for a higher moral life as well as a higher religious belief than was known among the heathen. It was very easy to sink to the lower level of the peoples about them ; the true faith was only maintained at the cost of tremendous self-sacrifice and terrible sufferings, as any one who reads the story of the Maccabees will find out.

Moreover, if the Jews were exclusive, one can only say that it is difficult to see how they could have preserved their monotheism without being



exclusive. Everywhere else, the advance to monotheism was fatal to the old religions. The traditional barriers between races, creeds, and religious fellowships were broken down, and all the old distinctions between the polytheistic religions were reduced to a common level, and that the level of the ground. But in this case—and let us note carefully that it is the only case of its kind—the barriers were not thrown down, but raised to a height unknown before. The monotheism of the prophets lifted the Jewish religion up out of the rut of polytheism and placed it upon a pedestal among religions. Here was a definite and visible religious fellowship marked out above all others by the possession of an infinitely higher religious belief. If it was to retain that higher belief, it was essential that it should keep itself free from contamination with the surrounding polytheisms. It had to be exclusive, and to assert its own superiority, in order to maintain its peculiar character.

Nor must we forget that these years between the Return from the Exile and the Birth of Jesus Christ were responsible for another result of profound significance. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the importance of a sense of continuity

with the past in fostering national self-consciousness. A primitive people who keep no records of the past, who have only hearsay traditions to connect with them their forefathers, are always deficient in a sense of their own national individuality. But when the long story of the past is written down, when a national literature comes into being which enshrines the hopes and fears, the ambitions and ideals, and celebrates the conquests and heroisms of former generations, that nation is assured of a place in history, if not of a posterity, for evermore. To collect, and preserve such a literature for the Jewish nation was the work of the centuries which succeeded the Exile; and since the national history of Israel was essentially a religious history, the history of Israel and Yahweh, the national literature of Israel was essentially a religious literature. When these ancient writings were collected together in one sacred volume, and were regarded as divinely inspired by the national God, they added an immense strength to the national consciousness and assured it of the permanence of its own individuality. And above all, the Scriptures constituted an authoritative standard of doctrine and conduct, to which appeal

could always be made when any one wished to know what the Jewish religion taught.

And thus it came about that in the days of Jesus Christ the Jewish nation was first and foremost a religious society, acutely conscious of itself as essentially different from all other religious societies, proud of its great past and eagerly looking forward to a still more glorious future. It was a society devoted to the worship of one Almighty and holy God ; it struck its roots into and drew its traditions from a period far back in the very beginnings of the human race ; and it possessed in its sacred Scriptures an authoritative source of divine teaching, a guarantee of its own continuity and identity, a marvellous record of ancient history, a more reasonable account of creation and of the infancy of the race than the world had ever known, and a set of moral precepts which could nowhere be surpassed. Moreover, the Jews were possessed of an extraordinary zeal for their religion and the society which embodied it, because they were filled with hope, the hope of the coming of the great day of intervention when their God would save them from all their enemies and give them peace and prosperity. Looking back upon the

great deeds of the past, they were quite certain that the God who had united Himself to their forefathers would fulfil His promises in the days of their descendants.

And this remarkable condition of things could scarcely have been brought about without the continuance of those peculiar religious experiences which were described in the last chapter. Had they ceased when the nation went into exile, it is most unlikely that there would ever have been a return. Had they ceased after the Return, it is most unlikely that the monotheistic faith would have been maintained in the face of so much discouragement and such bitter disappointments. For, although no great prophet appeared in Israel between the days of Malachi and those of John the Baptist, yet one must not forget that the background of monotheistic belief, which is so constant a feature of the mental atmosphere in which we live, was entirely absent from that of the Jewish fathers of the post-exilic period. If the Maccabees and their compatriots, in spite of the terrible persecutions which they suffered, were yet able to arouse a triumphant enthusiasm for the monotheistic faith of Israel, there must have been many whose hearts had

been touched by experiences not dissimilar from those of the earlier prophets.

Before we leave this period, let us observe that the organisation of the Jewish religion upon a monotheistic basis took place long before and quite independently of that stirring of intellectual life among the Greeks which resulted in the monotheism of the philosophical schools. If we put the earliest appearance of mono-Yahwism as late as the eighth century B.C., we still have about one hundred and fifty years to go before the first of the Greek philosophers flourished, and not till the latter half of the fifth century B.C. did a monotheistic belief appear to any one to be the best solution of the problem of the world. Thales, the earliest of the philosophers, is said to have begun his work at Miletus in 586 B.C., the very year that the Jews went into captivity in Babylon. The life of Socrates (469-399 B.C.) coincides with the period (444 B.C.) when mono-Yahwism became the established creed of the Jewish nation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the Chronological Table, p. xxi.

## CHAPTER IX

### JESUS CHRIST AND THE RELIGION OF THE JEWS

It is necessary to devote a whole chapter to the subject of our Lord's attitude towards the Jewish religion because it is one which is often misunderstood. Some people think of Him as having had but a chance connection with the Jewish religion. He had, they suppose, to be born under some religion, and it might as well be here as elsewhere. And then they place His universal sympathy, His broad humanity over against the narrow exclusiveness of Judaism, and His spiritual power and moral earnestness against their bigotry, hypocrisy, and literalism, and they conclude that His relation to the Jewish religion was simply one of opposition. There is some truth in all this ; but nothing could be more false than to take it as representing the whole truth.

One thing needs to be said before beginning this part of our inquiry. There are two points of

view from which we may discuss anything connected with Jesus Christ. We may start by assuming the Catholic doctrine of His Personality, that He was God the Son Incarnate ; or we may start without assuming the truth of that doctrine and also without assuming that it is false. As we have not so far assumed any religious belief whatever in this inquiry, it will be well to take the latter course here also. Moreover, most of us will feel that we must see how things look from the latter point of view before we can intelligently and sincerely take up the former.

We may begin then from this fixed point, which is the common property of all inquiries into His life and teaching. It was due to Him that the outward forms of the Jewish religion—the Law of Moses—ceased to be practised. He freed men from the burden of the Jewish Law, broke down the exclusiveness of Judaism, and introduced the universalism of Christianity. But how and in what sense ? This is the vital question and we are able to present it in the form of a clear-cut issue between two, and only two, possible alternatives. Either He taught that the Jews had been indeed bound to the Law as to an ordinance

revealed by God, and freed them from it by inducing them to believe that He possessed authority from God to abolish the covenant which God had once established ; or else, He taught them that the Law never had had any special divine origin, that it was a human institution like the law of every other nation, and that consequently they and their forefathers had been mistaken in supposing that they had ever been under any special obligation to God to observe it.

That these are the only two possible alternatives, it is easy to make plain. For if Jesus freed any one from the Law, He freed the Jews of His own day ; and they were firmly convinced that the Law was no human composition, but a divine institution supernaturally communicated to Moses by God Himself : it was a gift sent down from heaven. And because it was thus directly established by divine authority, nothing but a similar divine authority could suffice to remove it. It would have been useless for any one to say, ' here is something much better, or much more liberal, much nobler than the Law,' or to say, ' this or that part of the Law is really out of date, conflicts with modern ideas about God, or is not in keeping with the principle of the universal



love of God'; all such arguments would have sounded like blasphemy in the ears of men who believed that every letter of the Law was dictated by God, and that every notion about God, modern or ancient, must be tested by its agreement or disagreement with this supernatural revelation. Such men could never be persuaded to abandon the Law, unless you either showed them that it was no divine institution at all, or could prove that you had divine authority to invalidate it.

In which of these two ways then did He free them from the Law? There are three lines of thought which unite to show clearly that He adopted the latter. We may consider (1) the general state of thought of the day, (2) the Messianic belief, (3) the evidence of the Gospels.

(1) It must be remembered that the Jews never argued about the existence of one Almighty God; they never thought of trying to prove it by pointing to the natural world with all its wonders and intricate co-ordinations, nor did they attempt to show that this belief afforded the most reasonable solution of the problem of existence. Arguments of this kind were not unknown at the time, but they were confined to

the Greeks and their schools of philosophy. As was pointed out above, the Greeks discovered that there is but one God by the use of the human faculties of observation and reason ; and since human faculties are fallible, it was open to any one to dispute their arguments and deny their conclusions.

But the Jewish belief was based on no arguments at all, but on the authority of the Scriptures and the national traditions. The Scriptures offered no reasoned proof ; they simply claimed to be supernaturally inspired, personally dictated, by an Almighty God, and were themselves the chief evidence of His existence. The Jewish religion was based upon belief in a revelation given direct from heaven, and it involved the following points : there is but one Almighty and All-Holy God ; the Scriptures are the authoritative revelation of His will and His dealings with His people ; the Law of Moses expresses the terms on which alone men may obtain His favour ; the Jewish people alone know Him and hence have unique and exclusive religious privileges. All these were bound together as parts of a system, and all depended on the belief that a revelation had been given to the fore-

fathers of the Jewish nation by an Almighty God.

Now let us observe that if any Jew denied the divine origin of the Scriptures and the Law, he would also have destroyed the grounds of the Jewish belief in one God. If the Scriptures and the Law are human institutions, then it follows that the God of the Scriptures is a man-made institution too. If they do not spring from a supernatural source, it is plain that the grounds for believing in the God whose existence and will they profess to reveal are gone also. If a Jew came to deny the supernatural authority of the Law, he would cease to believe in one God at all, unless he found some reason for doing so other than the Scriptures. What other reason was there? Only the arguments common to the schools of Greek philosophy.

If then our Lord denied the claim of the Jewish Scriptures to supernatural inspiration, His belief in one God must have been based on Greek philosophy. In other words, He was really a philosopher. But to this view there are fatal objections. The social circles in which His life was spent were far removed from any contact with the learning of the Greeks. At what

point did He come in contact with philosophy? And why is there no trace of philosophical modes of thought in the Gospels? Again, as was pointed out above, the Greek monotheism was uncertain of itself, a thing which argued, reasoned, hesitated, and was liable to refutation. And yet we have all always felt that He speaks to us about God with the assured certainty of one who knows no manner of misgiving or doubt. His is not the spirit of one who has been through the bitter experience of having to repudiate the faith of his home and his childhood, and to find some fresh basis for his religious life. In fact, it is not too much to say that if Jesus did in reality deny that the Law had a supernatural authority behind it, the picture of Him that is drawn for us in the Gospels is wholly wrong, not merely in its details, but in its entire representation: the Gospels have painted some one else who had an entirely different mind, not the real Jesus.

(2) Another reason why it is impossible to think that He ever repudiated the exclusive claims of the Jewish religion is the fact that He shared the Messianic Hope of the Jews. As will be seen in Chapter XII., that hope was based on

the conviction that the Jewish nation was the one people of the Living God. Just because their God was the only God, and because they alone of all the families of the earth knew Him, they were sure that a day would come when He would manifest Himself in the sight of all men. If you destroyed their belief in their unique position, you at once destroyed the ground from which sprang the Messianic Hope ; there would be no more reason to expect a manifestation in connection with the Jewish religion than with any other. Consequently, a man who denied the supernatural origin of the Law and the Scriptures could not share in the Messianic Hope, much less could He claim to be the fulfilment of that Hope. Indeed, in claiming to be the Messiah, He claimed to be bringing in God's answer to that Hope, God's fulfilment of the promises made to the Jewish fathers. How then could He deny that those promises had ever been given by God ?

(3) And now let us look at the details of the Gospel picture. In the first place, with regard to His attitude toward the Scriptures of the Old Testament, there are many passages to prove that He regarded them as revealing the Will

of God. The two commandments than which there is none greater are taken out of the Old Testament. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord [Yahweh] is our God; the Lord is one; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. . . .' The second is this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.'<sup>1</sup> The context makes it quite clear that by the words 'Lord' and 'God' He meant what was meant by all His contemporaries—the national God of the Jews. He proves the Resurrection of the dead by the Scriptures,<sup>2</sup> and He knows that it is the will of God that the Messiah should suffer and die because of what is written in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> He seems to mean that the Scriptures contain the first part of a general plan of God, and that the same God is now going on to fulfil in His death and resurrection the second part of that plan. It is impossible to show that He ever quoted any authority, or drew His knowledge of God from any source, other than the Old Testament.

Then again, with regard to the Law, we have a plain statement of its binding authority in the

<sup>1</sup> R. V. marg. of Mark xii. 29, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xii. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Mark ix. 12; xiv. 21; Matt. xxvi. 54; Luke xviii. 31-33; xxii. 37; xxiv. 25-27, 44-47.

Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup> As a general rule, He observed the Law Himself and taught His disciples to do so also.<sup>2</sup> When He was taken to task by the Scribes and Pharisees for His behaviour, He had not really violated any part of the old Mosaic Law, but merely some one of the many regulations which composed the Tradition of the Elders. The Law must not be confused with this Tradition. The Scribes had been busy for many years in working out the application of the precepts of the original Mosaic Law, as contained in our Old Testaments, to the conditions of their own day. And they had amassed an enormous number of rules and regulations governing the conduct of a Jew for practically every hour of his life. This 'Tradition of the Elders,' it was which our Lord declined to obey, and of which He spoke at times with such great severity.

The chief causes of offence which the Pharisees found in His conduct were what they regarded as His laxity in observing the Sabbath; His neglect of certain ceremonial ablutions and fast-

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 17-19; cf. xxiii. 2, 3, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xi. 15-17; xiv. 12; Luke iv. 16; Matt. v. 23; xvii. 24-27; Mark i. 44.



ings ; His intercourse with publicans and sinners. It is true that He healed people on the Sabbath ; but this was forbidden neither by the Law nor by the Tradition. It is true again that His disciples plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath ;<sup>1</sup> but though this was one of thirty-nine kinds of work specifically forbidden by the Tradition, nothing is said of it in the Law. As regards ceremonial ablutions, the Jews at this time were very strict in performing them before eating certain kinds of food ; but no regulation to this effect is found in the original Law. Only one day of universal fasting is appointed in the Law, the great Day of Atonement ; but there is no reason to think that our Lord did not observe this fast. What surprised the Pharisees was that He did not impose His own rules of fasting upon His followers as did John the Baptist and other religious leaders.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the Law of Moses forbade a Jew to marry a Gentile, but placed no restriction on social intercourse between Jews. The reason why He seems to have declined to obey this Tradition of the Elders was not because He slighted the authority of the Law on which it

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 23-26.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ii. 18.



was based, but on the contrary, because He had the highest respect for the Law, and felt that the Tradition was a travesty of it and a stumbling-block in the way of its observance. 'Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition. For Moses said. . . .'<sup>1</sup> And often in His disputes with the Pharisees He appealed to the original Law or to the Scriptures to prove His case, thus showing that He differed from them about the proper interpretation of the Scriptures and the Law, but not about their authority.<sup>2</sup>

Again, we find that He fully accepted the belief that the Jews possessed exclusive religious privileges. The Father of whom He spoke was no other than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,<sup>3</sup> of Moses,<sup>4</sup> and of the prophets.<sup>5</sup> The Jews have special responsibilities<sup>6</sup> and special privileges; they are the guests who had received the special invitation to attend the banquet<sup>7</sup> and the husbandmen in charge of the vineyard.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mark vii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mark ii. 23-26; vii. 1-9; xii. 26, 27; Matt. xxiii. 16-21.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. viii. 11, 12; Mark xii. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Mark xii. 29, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Mark xii. 1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. viii. 10; xix. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. xxii. 2, 3; Luke xiv. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Mark xii. 9.

They are the children whose bread ought not to be given to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to dissociate our Lord from a belief in a supernatural revelation to the Jews. If He had ever spoken against Moses and the Law, if He had made any attempt to teach people that they were not bound to the Law because Moses had received no divine revelation, some record of that teaching must certainly have come down to us. There were enemies constantly on the watch to trip Him up and catch Him out in some disloyalty to the national religion; <sup>2</sup> when we read the story of S. Paul's imprisonment in Judaea,<sup>3</sup> we can understand what a storm of indignation any anti-Mosaic propaganda would have aroused, and how indelibly the memory of it would have been associated with the name of Jesus. And yet the only evidence the Sanhedrim could bring against Him was that of certain false witnesses who said, 'We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without

<sup>1</sup> Mark vii. 27; cf. Luke xiii. 16; xix. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xii. 13-15.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xxi.-xxv.; cf. especially xxi. 28; xxii. 21, 22; xxiv. 6, 12, etc.

hands. And not even so did their witness agree together.' <sup>1</sup>

Moreover, His own immediate disciples and friends remained unshaken in their belief in a special revelation to their forefathers. They used the Scriptures as other Jews did, as the authoritative revelation of God's will. They established the Messiahship of Jesus by proving that what He did and suffered corresponded with the predictions of the prophets.<sup>2</sup> It is quite clear that they intended no defection from the national religious system: they continued to observe the Law and to worship in the Temple. Any one who is at all familiar with the writings of the early Christians will know what a tremendously strong belief they had in the Old Testament, and what a powerful weapon they found it in their warfare against paganism. The Church conquered the world because the Christians were convinced that they were the bearers of a revelation from God Himself; a revelation given in times of great antiquity, long before the earliest of the Greek philosophers began to teach a monotheistic belief; a revelation accompanied

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 57-59.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 52; ix. 22; xvii. 3, 11; xviii. 28, etc.

by an abundance of divinely inspired prophecies, which had just received their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The Jews had received the first part, but now the Christians had inherited the whole.

Nothing can be more unhistorical than to separate Jesus Christ from a belief in the supernatural origin and exclusive claims of the Jewish religion. Those who are so fond of maintaining that He came to free us from all dogma will find it very difficult to dissociate Him from this all-embracing dogma, that a supernatural revelation had been given to the Jews alone out of all the families of the earth. If you are careful to read back into New Testament times a modern background with its atmosphere of monotheistic philosophy, you may succeed in blurring out the main inconsistencies, and then you can easily explain away a few texts from the Gospels. But once you realise that the surrounding atmosphere was that of polytheism, and that the Jewish monotheism stood or fell with the supernatural authority of the Jewish Scriptures, this whole attempt to represent Him as denying an exclusive revelation to the Jews must be abandoned. Moreover, as has been seen above, if Jesus did really deny the supernatural authority of the

Law, the Gospel picture must be wrong from end to end, and His most intimate friends must have completely misunderstood or have been entirely uninfluenced by His teaching on this point ; for they continued to believe in the Law as divine. One may say then with complete confidence that Jesus did not free men from the Law by teaching them that they never had been bound to it.

It now remains to be seen that the other alternative, which represents Him as claiming to possess divine authority to set aside the Mosaic system, and to institute a new Covenant and so to free men from the Law, is thoroughly in accord with the conditions of the day and with the evidence of the Gospels.

It is a well-known fact that at the time when our Lord appeared, many Jews were looking forward to the coming of a great divine representative who would be fully clothed with power and authority from God ; and some of the writings of the ancient prophets foretold the coming of a time when God would make a New Covenant with His people Israel. Accordingly, if Jesus is represented as claiming to possess divine authority to inaugurate a New Covenant, such a representation is not in the least out of keeping with the

general conditions of thought and belief in His day.

And the Gospels do represent Him as claiming this authority. In Him, He says, is the fulfilment of the ancient Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> He claims to fulfil the Law and the prophets;<sup>2</sup> He places His own words above those of Moses;<sup>3</sup> He claims to be Lord of the Sabbath and to have power to forgive sins;<sup>4</sup> to be greater than the Temple<sup>5</sup> and to stand in a more intimate relation to God than all the prophets.<sup>6</sup> To this may be added His frequent use of the title 'Son of Man,' which covered, though it did not obtrude, His claim to be Messiah. And so when we find it said that by one great act of Messianic authority He undertook to repeal the Mosaic and institute a New Covenant between God and His people, the Gospel picture of the Messiah is simply making itself complete. Whether Jesus actually did possess this divine authority or not will be discussed later on. For the present, the point is that He claimed this

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 12; xiv. 21; Matt. xxvi. 54; Luke xviii. 31, 32; xxii. 37; xxiv. 25-27, 44-47.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 21, 22, 33, 34, etc.; cf. Mark xiii. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Mark ii. 28, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xii. 6; cf. 41, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Mark xii. 1-8; cf. Matt. xi. 27-29.

authority and undertook, by thus instituting a New Covenant, to reorganise the Jewish national religion. And, as will be seen in the next chapter, the nature of that reorganisation was such that those who wished to enjoy the privileges of the national religion of the Jews were able to do so without being under any obligation to submit to the Law of Moses ; in a word, men were now freed from the burden of the Law, and the national religion was turned into a religion which was at least potentially universal.

## CHAPTER X

### THE RE-ORGANISATION OF THE JEWISH NATIONAL RELIGION INTO A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

ON Mount Sinai Moses united the tribes of Israel into one nation by bringing all into allegiance to one national God. Here are to be found the first beginnings of Israel's national existence, the rudiments of its systems of worship, of jurisprudence, and of morality. All these derived their sanction and authority to bind the nation and its individual members from the fact that they were promulgated in the name of the national God, as His Law or 'Torah.' It was understood that an agreement, a Covenant, had been made through Moses, the mediator between Israel and this great God who made Himself known by the name of Yahweh. Israel was to serve Yahweh and keep His 'Law,' and Yahweh was to extend His protection and favour to Israel.



Yahweh's favour, acceptance with Him, depended on Israel's observance of His 'Law.' For many centuries this seems to have been regarded as a national rather than an individual affair. Yahweh treated with the nation as a whole and demanded national or corporate uprightness, the administration of justice according to His Law, and a sound moral condition in the national life. But from the time of the Exile onwards a sense of individual responsibility seems to have come to the front, and shows itself in the idea that when the great day of Yahweh's visitation comes, the individual will have to show that he in his own conduct has faithfully observed Yahweh's 'Law'; else, he can have no share in the salvation which awaits the nation. Salvation, or the enjoyment of Yahweh's favour, is still a corporate or national affair; but besides this, the individual Jew must show that he has deserved or earned it by obedience to the Law. In this sense, salvation under the old or Mosaic Covenant depended upon the observance of the Law.

But Jesus undertook to inaugurate the New Covenant between God and His people.<sup>1</sup> 'This

<sup>1</sup> It is called 'the covenant' in Mark xiv. 24; Matt. xxvi. 28; 'the new covenant' in Luke xxii. 20; 1 Cor. xi. 25; Heb. ix. 15; cf. viii. 8.

is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many.'<sup>1</sup> The language is sacrificial, and can only be understood by reference to the institution of the Mosaic Covenant described in Exodus xxiv. Moses took the blood of the victims which had been sacrificed and sprinkled it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which Yahweh hath made with you upon all these conditions,' *i.e.* observance of the Law which had just been read.<sup>2</sup>

Our Lord then means that His death was a sacrifice for the sins of God's people, and that this is the basis of the New Covenant. Henceforth, salvation or admission into the Messianic kingdom does not depend on the observance of the Law, but on the death of the Messiah. God has made a propitiation, and salvation is freely offered. But the offer was such that it involved a voluntary act on the part of the individual. Not the nation as a corporate whole, but each man, had to accept this salvation for himself; for it implied a faith in Jesus' power to save, in His Messiahship and divine mission. Thus the basis of salvation was shifted, as it

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ex. xxiv. 8, R.V. margin.

were, from the observance of the Law to personal faith in Jesus Christ and in His death as the means of salvation.

Henceforth every one who believed that Jesus was Messiah knew that he could be saved, not by the works of the Law, but by the free gift of God, by the grace of the Lord Jesus. ‘Brethren, what shall we do? Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ [*i.e.* publicly accept Jesus as Messiah] unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.’<sup>1</sup> ‘In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.’<sup>2</sup> Thus the old religion was by one simple act completely reorganised.

The practical consequences of this reorganisation were not perceived all at once; it took time, and the changes which come with time, to bring out its full import. The book of Acts tells of a controversy in the Apostolic Church about the observance of the Law. The history of that controversy is the history of how the Apostles

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Acts iv. 12.

came to realise the consequences of this reorganisation.

Let us glance briefly at the main turning-points in the process. First of all it profoundly affected the position of the Gentiles. Under the Mosaic system, any one who wished to be saved had to be circumcised and keep the whole Law, which, for Gentiles, involved a complete sundering of every natural tie of blood relationship and friendship; a Gentile had to become a Jew and live as did the Jews in order to be saved. But once the Law was made unnecessary to salvation, then circumcision and all that was distinctive of Jewish nationality became unnecessary; a Gentile might be saved and still remain a Gentile. This was the point which came out so clearly at the apostolic council described in Acts xv. The Jews, it was assumed, ought to continue to observe the Law, but, since Jew and Gentile alike were saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, there could be no sufficient reason to put the yoke of the Law upon the necks of the Gentile converts.

The next step was to realise that the Law, where it caused a separation between Jewish and Gentile believers, ought not to be observed

by Jewish believers. This step was taken during the lifetime of S. Paul.<sup>1</sup> The last step was to see that neither Jew nor Gentile ought any longer to follow any of the Mosaic customs; and this was taken in the sub-Apostolic Age, when the Church separated itself from the Ebionites or Jewish Christians, who still persisted in observing the Law. Thus the universalism of Christianity resulted from the fact that certain Jews came to believe that the basis of salvation had been shifted from the Law to the Death of the Messiah. Henceforth the Gentiles were free to enter upon the privileges of the New Covenant on precisely the same terms as the native-born Jews.

There is a point here on which it is necessary to insist very strongly. The universalism of Christianity did not mean that other religions were regarded by the Christians as more or less on an equality with their own, but that all men, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, were given precisely the same opportunities of accepting the privileges of the one true religion. Where other religions were concerned, Christianity was every bit as exclusive as Judaism, for

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 14 ff; 1 Cor. ix. 21.

it would tolerate none of them ; but it was less exclusive in that the terms on which it accepted converts did not involve a change of nationality as well as of religion. What really happened was that the ancient national religion ceased to be a national and became a potentially universal religion.

One should not fail to note that throughout the entire controversy no one ever appealed to any sayings of the Lord of a 'liberal' or universalising tendency. The discussion revolved round these two main points : (1) seeing that all alike are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, the Law is no longer necessary, and hence the Gentiles stand on the same level of opportunity as the Jews ; (2) this does not imply a divine rejection of the Jewish national religion, but its true end, the consummation to which, as the Scriptures testify, it had always been intended by God to lead.

But there is yet another side to the reorganisation which our Lord brought about. The coming of the Messiah constituted a turning-point in the national religion. Henceforth there must of necessity be a post-Messianic and a pre-Messianic Israel. The post-Messianic, or the

new Israel, consisted of all those who were obedient to the Messiah, who hearkened to Jesus as to God's omnipotent representative. If the whole nation had accepted the Apostolic preaching, as the Apostles evidently hoped and expected that they would, there would have been no disobedient remnant. But a thing which caused surprise and great grief to the Apostles happened—the vast majority of Jews refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. But did this fact of their unbelief make Jesus to be any the less the Messiah? Did it cause the promises of God to fail? That was impossible. Those Jews who refused to believe in the Messiah by that unbelief cut themselves off from the true stock of Abraham, from the true fellowship of the People of God. As S. Peter said, 'It shall be that every soul which shall not hearken to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus it came about that the Apostles and their company of fellow-believers found themselves in the position of being the true Israel, the true People of God, who have not only inherited all the privileges and blessings given by God to the ancient Jewish religion, but also, through Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 23; Lev. xxiii. 29.

the Messiah, were assured of the forgiveness of sins, and received the earnest or pledge of the Holy Spirit, who made His presence felt in their hearts and consciences.

Any one who believed that Jesus was the Messiah was bound to hold that the unbelieving Jews had cut themselves off, and that in this Apostolic company of believers in Jesus was to be found the true Israel of God. At first they were known by different names, such as the 'brethren,' the 'way,' the 'believers,' the 'saints,' but later on the titles 'Christian,' and 'Church' came into universal use. When, therefore, S. Matthew's Gospel represents our Lord as saying that upon the rock of S. Peter's confession of His Messiahship, He would build His Church, it reflects a tradition which is entirely true to the facts ; for the idea of the Church was involved in the very claim of Jesus to be Messiah ; and its existence in fact followed as a direct consequence of the admission of that claim.<sup>1</sup>

And so the Church began its way, a visible society, with a clear consciousness of itself as occupying a high place, or rather, the highest place, in the plans and purposes of God Almighty.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 18.



The Covenant on Sinai, the call of Abraham, even the creation of the world, had been intended to lead up to this, the coming of the Messiah, the appearance of a new Israel, the salvation of all men in the Church.

## CHAPTER XI

### DISCOVERY AND REVELATION

WE have now traced the course of the development of the Jewish religion and the part it has played in history. Beginning with that which first distinguishes the Jewish from other religions—the ethical monotheism of the prophets—we saw that that belief must be ascribed to certain remarkable experiences enjoyed by the prophets ; we saw, too, how those experiences initiated a series of organically related events which have continued to the present day : the ancient national religion was organised upon a monotheistic basis and then reorganised in such a way as to enable it to become universal ; and so under the name of Christianity that same ancient religion is with us still. So far the discussion has been carried on in the dry light of scientific inquiry. The results thus far reached do not depend on any kind of religious belief on our

part ; they are simply facts of history and psychology. Whether we believe in a God or not, these things are true, the world contains these facts. And the question now comes in, what ought to be our attitude towards them ? If the Christian Church is the product of such an age-long sequence of events of so remarkable a character, what are we to make of it ? That depends on our religious belief. If there is no God, we must leave our subject here ; there is nothing more to be said. But if there is a God, and if we believe that He may give us a Revelation of Himself and His will to guide us through this world, have we such a Revelation here ? It now remains therefore to review these facts in the light of a definite belief in God.

First of all, it should be noted that when we introduce this assumption of the existence of a God who can reveal Himself, we necessarily begin to use the words ' Religion ' and ' Revelation ' in a sense which has hitherto had no place. So far we have spoken of the religion of Babylonia, the religion of Egypt, and the religion of Israel. When used in this sense, we mean by ' religion ' certain outward facts of an historical character by which one religion is distinguished from the

other, such as divine names, rites, common beliefs, etc., etc. But on the other hand, if there be a God, and if communion with Him be possible, then we need the word 'Religion' to denote that communion between God and man; and this is obviously something inward, a spiritual fact, something very different from the external facts by which one historical religion is distinguished from another. In order to avoid confusion, one ought to make one's meaning plain by speaking of 'spiritual' religion, and of 'historical' or 'external' religion: but, perhaps, the use, or non-use of a capital letter will serve to mark the distinction. 'Religion' then with a capital 'R' means the communion which we believe men may enjoy with God; 'religion,' on the other hand, when spelt with a small 'r' means the outward external manifestations of the religious life of man.

Then again, we must note that with this assumption, it becomes necessary to introduce distinctions of 'true' and 'false' in Religion. The students of the science called 'comparative religion' are continually inveighing against the practice, once popular among Christian writers, of classifying religions into 'true' and 'false,' and putting Christianity alone into the former

class and all others into the latter. And from their point of view, they are quite right. The scientific student of religious phenomena has no business to begin his studies by dividing his data into 'true' and 'false'; the astronomer or the geologist might just as well call some stars or some rock-formations 'true' and others 'false.' In neither case would the distinction have any meaning. But, of course, Religion is something which neither astronomy nor geology is. If a man claims to have held communion with God, the questions, did he really do so? was his experience true or false? are full of meaning. Accordingly, when we assume that communion with God is possible, we must distinguish genuine instances of such communion, *i.e.* 'true' Religion, from false and spurious imitations of it. Moreover, it will be seen below that the instances of 'true' Religion are so closely associated with the external forms of one particular religion as to warrant us in applying the term 'true' to this one religion and designating the rest as 'false' or misleading.

Another term which needs to be examined is 'Revelation.' If there is no God, there can, of course, by no possibility be any revelation of

Him. But if there is a God who is both immanent in nature, as the sustainer of its existence, and also transcendent above nature as one who can act upon it from the outside, as it were, then there are two ways in which we may conceivably come to know Him. We may study the facts of nature, we may see what He is from what the world is ; and so by our own efforts, through the exercise of our own powers of observation and reflection, we may come to learn something about Him. Or, on the other hand, God might disclose Himself to us directly without our seeking for Him in and through nature. Just how a revelation of this latter kind could take place, it is useless to inquire at present ; but it is not inconceivable that God should reveal Himself to us in other ways than through the mediation of the phenomena of nature and our knowledge of them. The word ' Revelation ' properly applies to this last method of self-disclosure when God reveals Himself directly. The knowledge of God which we glean by applying our faculties to the secrets of nature should properly be called ' Discovery,' since it is really carried on through human faculties ; but it has become the custom to apply the word ' revelation ' to this as well, and there

is little use arguing about words as long as we know what we mean. Perhaps the use or non-use of a capital letter will serve to preserve this distinction also; 'revelation' then means the knowledge about God which man derives from studying the facts of existence and would better be called 'Discovery'; 'Revelation,' on the other hand, stands for a knowledge of God given directly and not mediated through the phenomena of nature.

Let us endeavour then, in the light of these distinctions, to take a brief survey of the religious life of man in order to see the place and value which should be assigned to these peculiar experiences of the Hebrew prophets. The polytheistic religions of the ancient world offer no proof or indication of anything which can be called either Religion or Revelation. As was seen at the close of Chapter VII., there is nothing in the religious experiences of the polytheists which cannot be accounted for by wholly natural processes; the sub-conscious mind brought up from its hidden depths the things which previous experience of life had stored there.

And there is another reason why it is impossible to assign a high value to the polytheisms. It is

surely inconceivable that any one should have intimate personal communion with God, as the polytheists claimed to do, and yet continue to think that He is one among many others, or that He is of an indifferent moral character. The strong and the good, even among men, impress others with a sense of their strength and their goodness; and yet, if the experiences of the polytheists were instances of true Religion, then these polytheists went away from communing with God, the Almighty and inconceivably Holy, more firmly convinced than ever that He is but one of a large class and of an indifferent moral character. And if there is no real Religion here, neither is there any Revelation; for no new truth, no new position was reached; all that resulted was that these polytheists became more firmly convinced of the truth of the things in which they had always believed.

Still, the ancient world was not left entirely without any witness from God. If God is immanent in nature, then the natural world speaks to us of God, and there is a knowledge about Him to be found in it. The revelation was there, but it was necessary that men should go in search of it and endeavour to read it; and this the



ancient world did not seriously attempt to do until the inquisitive minds of the Greeks began to pry into the secrets of nature. At first they made many blunders as was to be expected ; but eventually, Plato and Aristotle, and possibly Socrates before them, grasped the truth that God is one, and that there is no unrighteousness in Him. But this does not constitute a Revelation. One can trace step by step the process by which this position was reached, and everywhere it is a process of human discovery ; it was in no sense a religious process ; we may, if we like, call it divine, because all good things proceed from God ; but this knowledge about God was not mediated by any of the ancient religions ; on the contrary, its triumph involved their downfall. 'Discovery,' or if we like, 'revelation' is the proper term to use here.

But now let us turn to the phenomena of the Hebrew religion. And here there is at once a difference. Here is found just that which was lacking in the ancient polytheisms. The polytheists gained no new truth in their experiences ; the mono-Yahwists did. The polytheists were confirmed in their polytheistic beliefs ; but these particular Hebrew prophets were led to repudiate

polytheism and to regard monotheism as the only truth. These mono-Yahwists passed through moments of intense religious feeling, in which they became convinced that there is but one God and that He is absolutely righteous. As was seen in Chapter VII., it is impossible to ascribe this to the working of the sub-conscious mind ; that some factor must have been operating from the outside is shown by the fact that this result was wholly at variance with all the logic, the prejudices, and the habits of thought of the day. In the world of that day it was a new thing ; and yet the prophets were as firmly convinced of its truth as they were of their own existence.

Let us be sure that we understand the point involved here. It is not such an uncommon thing for people of the present day to experience moments in which they believe they have ' seen ' God. Many such instances will be found in any book on religious psychology, and the subjects of them are for ever after unalterably convinced that this alone can adequately explain what they felt at the time. But these modern cases are not analogous to those of the Hebrew prophets ; for these moderns have been brought

up in our modern atmosphere of monotheistic religion ; from their earliest days they have been trained to think, and everything has conspired to suggest to them, that there can be but one God ; consequently, when an 'uprush' of a religious character from their sub-conscious selves takes place within them, it is only natural that it should take a monotheistic form, just as the experiences of those brought up in a polytheistic atmosphere took a polytheistic form. It would be impossible to say that none of these modern cases were instances of communion with God ; on the other hand, since this natural psychological explanation is at hand, one cannot be sure that any one of them was in reality what it appeared to be to the man who passed through it. But the case of the Hebrew prophets is different. They were brought up in the polytheistic atmosphere, surrounded on all sides by people who were convinced polytheists ; they shared all those beliefs about the natural world and its constitution which were characteristic of the polytheistic stage of culture ; in fact there must have been a hundred influences playing upon their daily lives which would suggest to their sub-conscious minds that polytheism was a grim

and stern reality. And yet as a result of certain religious experiences they were convinced that there was but one Holy and Almighty God. Clearly, these could not have been merely so many more instances of an 'uprush' from the sub-conscious. There must have been some additional factor at work here.

Do not these experiences bear about them every mark of being instances of communion with the Living God? Surely, if communion between God and man is possible at all, we must see it here; for here we have just that impression produced upon the mind which we have every right to think would be produced by the Holy and Almighty Personality of God. If these are not cases of communion between God and man, then either such communion is impossible, or else no one has ever yet enjoyed it.

There is then some good reason to regard these as instances of true Religion; and if they are instances of true Religion, they also constitute a Revelation; for in them was made known to men a truth about God which had not been derived from the study of His works in the world of nature.

And now, granted that these are each in them-

selves instances of communion with God, what is the significance of the fact that they are always associated with the Name of Yahweh, the God of Israel? We have not, of course, a record of all the experiences of all the prophets of the ancient world, and therefore we cannot exclude the possibility that others besides the Hebrews had experiences of this kind; but this at least may be said: if any non-Hebrew did pass through such a state of mind, the evidence for it has perished; it came and it went, and has left no trace behind it, either in written record or in the establishment of a monotheistic type of religion. Such cases cannot have been frequent; at best, they were few and far between.

It cannot be a matter of chance that experiences of this type occurred so frequently and so persistently in Israel for a period of three hundred years or more, and that no one of those who passed through them was ever detached by them from his allegiance to the national God of Israel, or seems to have supposed for a moment that the Almighty and All-Holy God, with whom he had intercourse, was other than Yahweh. If any one of these was in reality an instance of communion with God, then the close and

continued association of the whole series with this Name of Yahweh implies a divine choice of this Name as a medium of Revelation.

It is the fashion among ' liberal ' thinkers of the present day to regard religion as one great fact running through the entire length and breadth of the human race, and assuming so many different temporary embodiments in so many different outward systems. According to this view, God cares nothing for the outward forms, no one of which can make a claim to special divine authority ; true Religion, they say, the intercourse of the soul with God, is independent of all externals and is not the special privilege of any one religious system. Now, if this assumption were true, we would expect, on looking back over the history of the past, to find that instances of true Religion occurred in many different religions, and that one man in one race, and another in another, was selected, according to some special capacity or fitness of the individual, to enjoy this great privilege of communion with God. But as a matter of fact, what do we find ? The history of the past reveals to us no single instance that we can recognise unmistakably as true Religion, apart from the people of Israel and the Name of

Yahweh ; but within the limits of this otherwise insignificant nation, we find a series of such instances extending over a period of several centuries. Were there no good men outside Israel ? Were all the naturally pure and truth-loving souls concentrated within this one race ? History gives us no right to think this. We only have to recall the characters of such men as Socrates and Plato to see that it was not so. Sometimes it is said that the Hebrews had a special genius for religion. But what does this mean ? If it means that other peoples were less in earnest, less devoted to their gods, less whole-hearted in their worship and belief, or less generous in their sacrifices, it is entirely untrue. If it means that the religious life and disposition of the average Hebrew in the days before the Return from the Exile in Babylon differed from those of his contemporaries, it is again untrue, as was seen abundantly in Chapter iv. But if it means that the religious experiences of a long line of Hebrew prophets differed profoundly from anything we know of elsewhere in the ancient world, it is entirely true ; but to say this is not to solve, but merely to restate the problem. One cannot point to any ‘ natural ’ condition common



to all these mono-Yahwist prophets, and to them alone out of the whole ancient world, which will account for the fact that they alone enjoyed these wonderful experiences : it was an act of sovereign divine choice.

And this conclusion may be supported by another consideration. We are no fit judges of how God may or may not vouchsafe a Revelation of Himself, but this at least may be said : under the religions and intellectual conditions of the ancient world, two methods of Revelation through religious experience, and two only, are conceivable. In one of these, instances of true Religion would not be associated with any one divine name whatever, but those who experienced communion with the Almighty God would be led to believe that He is not to be identified with any known deity but is behind them all, greater and more powerful than any special national god ; such a method of Revelation would, of course, lead conclusively to the view that all existing outward forms and systems of religion were alike unimportant. The other method would involve the limitation of all true Religion to one system, and to one Divine Name, and would lead us conclusively to the belief that this system and this



Name had been chosen to be a specially authorised medium of Revelation.

But no third intermediate method of Revelation is possible, because, if intercourse with God had been associated now with one religious system and now with another, now with Yahweh and now with Chemosh, or with Marduk, the result must have been a religious war of extermination in the name of the one true God ; for one who experienced Chemosh to be the only God would feel it a solemn duty to deny and to repel the claim that Yahweh was the only God ; while just in proportion as his experiences were really instances of communion with God, would the worshipper of Marduk be compelled to regard the claims of Yahweh and Chemosh as the worst kind of blasphemy. The result would have been the bitterest religious strife and contention. If things had happened thus, we would never have regarded them as constituting a Revelation from a God of love.

But the pages of history leave us in no manner of doubt as to which method actually was followed. They speak with no equivocal voice ; they afford us no evidence of experiences which we can recognise as instances of true Religion

except those which were closely and inextricably united to the Name of Yahweh.

Now all this means that the corporate principle in religion is a true one; that the outward organised aspect of our religious life is taken cognizance of by God; and that He designs to deal with us, not solely as individuals, but also as a corporate whole. And it seems that in the pursuance of this purpose this Name of Yahweh was chosen by God out of all the divine names current in the ancient world, and was filled out by Him with a truth and reality which did not belong to any other. He chose to stand behind this Name, as it were, to reveal Himself under it, to the exclusion of all others.

And more than this. In those days it was the universal belief that the system of religion possessed by any nation, its external organisation and ritual, as well as its codes of morals and of law, were the appointment of the national god, the expression of his will, and therefore directly authorised by him. And since each nation was held together by the consciousness that it worshipped one and the same national god, it followed that each national god had his own definite circle or fellowship of worshippers and

that any one who desired to enjoy his protection or favour and to have any right to worship him, must seek to be admitted into this special privileged community which was called by his name and known as his people. Accordingly, if God chose the Name of Yahweh, He chose also that which was inseparably associated with this Name, the entire national organisation of Israel. The systems of worship and of jurisprudence summed up in the Law of Moses were indeed the 'Law' of the Living God, charged with a special divine authority; and the national religious fellowship of Israel, as a corporate whole, enjoyed special privileges as the People of the Living God, privileges not shared in by any other community.

When one says that this outward system of religion received a special divine sanction, one must not think of the gross licentious worship carried on at the ancient shrines or high places, in the days before the Exile; these abuses were no part of the original religion of Yahweh, but were borrowed from the Baal-worship of the Canaanites. After the Exile, as was seen in Chapter VIII., mono-Yahwism became the accepted creed of the whole nation, and a detailed system of ritual was drawn up which was intended to

embody and express the great principles set forth by the prophets that Yahweh is the one and only God, and that Israel alone is His People and must serve Him in holiness and purity. It is for this noble system of religion, contained now in our Bibles under the name of the 'Law of Moses,' for which a special divine sanction is claimed. This system, then, was the true religion, in the sense that it alone had divine authority, and it alone could lead directly to God. Other systems were misleading, because, in that they taught men to worship beings other than Yahweh, they taught them to worship that which was not the Living God; in order to know the true God it was necessary to abandon these religions and start afresh within the Jewish religion. The Mosaic system, 'the Law,' as it is called in the New Testament, could assure you of the knowledge of the true God, and if you observed it carefully of salvation.

To say this is to place an exceedingly high value on the Jewish religion. And it would be quite impossible to accept this view, if this national religion had ended with itself and had passed away leaving nothing more behind it than did the religions of Babylonia, of Egypt,

and of Greece. As a matter of fact, however, this was not the case. Those unique experiences of the prophets did not end with themselves ; as was seen above, they first brought about the organisation of the national religion upon a monotheistic basis ; as will be seen in the following chapter, they created a confident expectation that the national God would give a further revelation of Himself and cause Israel's religion to become universal ; and then, there appeared Jesus who claimed to be the answer of God to that expectation and to have authority to reorganise the national religion in such a way as to enable it to become universal ; and finally, that same religion, in its reorganised form, is still a powerful factor in human life. And so out of the religion of that primitive Eastern tribe there has sprung a scheme of things which is now world-wide and age-long and has proved its beneficent character and its power over the hearts and lives of men in every generation. If anything in the created world is worthy to have come from a God of love, it is this.

And there is something providential, too, in the relation, in respect of time, in which this scheme of things stands towards the general progress of civilisation. It was seen at the end

of Chapter VIII. that the adoption of monotheism as the official creed of the Jewish nation took place about the time when the Greek philosophers were first beginning to see that a belief in one Almighty God is the best answer to the problem of how the universe came into being. But by the time that Christianity was ready to go out into the world, these views of the philosophers were spread far and wide over the civilised world. And they were proving fatal not only to the old religions, but also to the old morality. Since the new God had been discovered by men, it was plain that He had not stepped in to give a Revelation of Himself. Perhaps He did not care to do so, and perhaps He could not ; but in any case it was only by a long process of reasoning and reflection that men discovered Him. And so, if fellowship with Him was possible at all, it could only be for the highly cultured few. For the average man, there could be no certainty of access to Him, no matter how much he might crave for it. And as all the old religions were man-made institutions, so also, it seemed, were the old rules of moral conduct. If He has not spoken, how can it be known that morality is not a mere human

convention, or that He cares in the least about our conduct or our prayers? The paralysing uncertainty which Greek philosophy brought with it went far towards destroying the moral and religious life of the ancient world.

The world was thus doubly prepared for Christianity. On the one hand, Christianity needed an atmosphere which was prepared to welcome its monotheism as the only credible form of religion; and on the other hand, the world stood in dire need of just such a religion as that of Christ. Its ethical monotheism, its great antiquity, the extraordinary fulfilment of ancient prophecies of which it could boast, its marvellous Scriptures with their account of the early history of the world, all combined to prove that it was a sure and certain message from that one Almighty God of whom the philosophers spoke. Moreover, it sounded forth with no uncertain note, in the Name of the one true God, a trumpet call to a strict moral life, and was able to impart to men the power to live up to its demands. Had the ancient world been left to itself without the religion of Jesus Christ, it would have relapsed into barbarism, and the very discovery of monotheism by the Greeks would have



been one of the chief factors responsible for that relapse.

So much may be urged in favour of the view of the Jewish Religion advanced here. And now, one objection, which will no doubt weigh heavily with many people, must be dealt with briefly. The modern mind has the most intense dislike to the idea of special privileges in religion, to the idea that one religion and one religious fellowship should be chosen to the exclusion of others : it is felt to be out of keeping with what we may expect of a God who is love and who loves all men. This, of course, is an ancient dislike which has its roots in the world of philosophy and in the Greek discovery that there can be but one God. It has no place in the Bible or in the Christian religion. In answer to it the following points may be urged. The exclusion of all but one religious fellowship was temporary only ; it was avowedly, as will be seen in the next chapter, intended to lead up to the inclusion of all, and as a matter of fact, if it has not yet embraced all, that is due partly to the failure of Christians to realise their duty towards missions and partly to the failure of the heathen to appreciate what is set before them. Again, nothing



is more obvious than that the human race has to progress from lower to higher stages, and that in this progress one nation has temporary advantages over others ; in fact, though God is a God of love, no two peoples and no two individuals ever come into the world with exactly the same opportunities before them and the same equipment for meeting them ; if, as is the case in so many other respects, the temporary advantage of a few led to the permanent benefit of all, why should it not be so in Religion as well ? Finally, if it is the will of God that all men should ultimately be included in one self-conscious brotherhood, in one universal religious fellowship, of which each individual has voluntarily become a member, it is difficult to see how, the conditions of human life being what they are and were, this plan could have been accomplished otherwise than by the special choice of a single national religion in the ancient world to become the matrix of a universal religion.

Looking back then over the history of this religion as a whole, both in ancient and modern times, one can see that it constitutes a great plan running through the ages such as is worthy to have come from God and to represent His will.

And all this must be counted in favour of that high and unique value which has been assigned in this chapter to the ancient Hebrew religion.

But now there comes in another question. Granted that the Jewish religion did have this special divine authority behind it, can we believe that Jesus of Nazareth really was the Messiah, that He had divine authority to reorganise that religion in the way in which history proves that He did? He claimed to be Messiah, are we justified in accepting that claim?

It is impossible here to discuss this question with all the fulness of detail which might be brought to bear upon it. But we are not now entering on it in the dry spirit of the scientific student. We are now viewing the whole matter in the light of a belief that there is a God who may reveal Himself, and also, in the light of the results reached thus far, that He did reveal Himself in and through the Jewish religion. When we say that Jesus was the Messiah, we mean at least this, that He was a supernatural Being sent into the world by God with a message of salvation for His people Israel. It is really too late to dispute this point; for it is now one of the commonplaces of criticism that He claimed

to be Messiah; moreover we see what He has wrought upon the Jewish religion; it is impossible to think that that religion was itself the object of special divine providence, and that its greatest Figure, its most devout and religious member, should, without any divine authority whatever, have succeeded, under claim of possessing such authority, in completely altering the character of that religion and its course of development.

And if we believe that God did thus choose the religion of Israel as a medium of Self-Revelation, and that Jesus was the Messiah, it necessarily follows not only that it is the will of God that all men should unite before Him in one definite religious fellowship, but also that this historical religion, reorganised as it was by Jesus, is the divinely appointed sphere of the knowledge of the true God. The new Israel, the People of God, the Church of Jesus Christ, the true religion, the sphere of salvation, the communion of the Saints—all these terms express one and the same great truth, that here is a divinely appointed home for the religious life of man, within which he may be sure of knowing the true God. And this means that we are

saved not simply as individuals but as members of a body. If the individual is to work out his own salvation it can only be as a member of this body. We who are members have a duty towards the body as a whole ; and as a living fellowship, we have a corporate responsibility towards God. The Church is, or ought to be, one, and should make itself felt in the world as a single whole.

And there is yet another meaning in this which ought to be noted. Some people experience mystic states in which they are sure they see God and know Him ; others, and these by far the majority, have no such inward certainty ; and even in the case of those who have them, the world outside is inclined to wonder whether after all these mystic states may not begin and end in the subject's own mind without any divine assistance from without. But if there is any truth in the preceding pages they will supply an answer to these questionings. If God has chosen and authorised a particular religious fellowship, those who place themselves within the limits of this fellowship receive a guarantee that God does hear their prayers, even though they are not accompanied by any great emotional

disturbance. The divine choice of a particular religious fellowship means that God has undertaken, if such a term may be allowed, to meet us under certain definite outward conditions ; that the knowledge of God does not depend on the accident of our psychical temperaments, but upon faith in the promises of God and the repentance which He has ever required from the days of the prophets onward. Our religious lives will differ according to the different spiritual gifts which are given to us, but the same salvation is offered to all and upon the same terms.

And now there comes in a yet more important question, and here again it is only possible to suggest a few leading thoughts. The Church has believed that Jesus was God the Son Incarnate. What is to be said of this view ? That belief was not based on argument or reason, but on experience, the experience which the Apostles and other early Christians had of Jesus and which the Church has had to the present day. Can that experience be trusted ? To many minds religious experience is the very thing which cannot be trusted, and that for several reasons. They say that its results are so varied, so uncertain, and so conflicting, that it

may be made to justify almost any belief ; it admits of a simple and natural explanation as due to self-suggestion ; it makes the rational side of our nature of no account, if it does not flatly contradict reason. But, if there is any truth in the argument of this book, it will be seen that these objections do not apply to the experiences under consideration. The religious experiences of the Hebrew prophets were neither conflicting nor uncertain in their results ; for wherever they resulted in the belief that there is but one God, they united that belief with the dogma that this one God is the national God of Israel ; nor do they admit of the usual natural explanation, for there was nothing to suggest the truth of monotheism to those who experienced them ; finally, they do not contradict reason, but induced men to believe firmly in something which centuries afterwards human reflection discovered to have a good claim to represent the truth. If the prophetic experiences are to be trusted, then those of the Apostles and of the early Church are to be trusted also ; for they too experienced the almighty power and holiness of the same Divine Person, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And they believed that this

Revelation came to them in and through Jesus or the Spirit of Jesus. If the religion of Israel was chosen as the divine medium of Revelation, and if Jesus was indeed that Supernatural Being, the Messiah, sent into the world by the Living God with authority to create a new Israel, one cannot think that these experiences of the Apostles of the New Israel were not inspired by the same God who inspired the prophetic experiences. If this method of self-Revelation was used in the one case, why should it not be used in the other also? There is a direct line of continuity between the prophetic and the Apostolic experiences; and if the one series is divine, so also is the other.

But in one respect the Apostolic experiences differed from those of the prophets. With a strange unanimity the early Church experienced the Power and Holiness of the national God in association with the Personality of Jesus the Messiah. God, the Creator and supreme Sovereign of the Universe, the immanent Spirit who indwells all things, and by whom all things have their being, Jesus the Messiah, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, all these in the experience of the Church, were one, although they

were also known as in some way distinct. The Apostolic Christians learned to worship the Father as God, the Son as God, and the Holy Ghost as God, and yet they knew that they were not three Gods, but one God. And this imposed upon the Church in later days the task of trying to make clear to the world that its faith really was that God is Three in One, and that Jesus who was known as man was also God. And so when we look back upon the entire process, we cannot do otherwise than believe that these experiences and the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation to which they gave birth were revealed to the Church by the inspiration of God.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE FULFILMENT OF THE MESSIANIC HOPE

IN the early centuries of the Christian era the argument from prophecy and its fulfilment was one of the strongest weapons in the armoury of the Christian apologist. In accordance with the mental habits of the day, passages from the Old Testament were cited as predictions without any careful regard to what their authors really intended to say. Consequently, when the rigorous methods of historical and literary criticism were applied to the Bible, it soon became apparent that in very many cases there was no real connection between the passages in question and the events which they were supposed to foretell. And so the argument has since fallen into the background.

As a matter of fact, however, there is a very strong argument to be drawn from the fulfilment

of the Messianic expectation, though it cannot be stated in the older form.

But before attempting to state this argument, it is necessary to understand what is meant by the Messianic Hope. 'Messianic' is the English form of a Hebrew word which means 'anointed,' and is equivalent to the Greek *χριστός* or Christ. When persons or things were consecrated or set apart for the service of Yahweh, they were anointed; and so any of His servants, but especially the King of Israel, might be called Yahweh's anointed one, or His Christ. And from this its use was extended to designate that great representative or plenipotentiary whom at certain periods the Jews were sure that God would some day send to them; in the century or two immediately preceding our Lord's birth, it was applied to this expected Deliverer in a technical sense; He was the Christ, the Messiah. Hence the term 'Messianic,' when used in its strict sense, has reference to him and to him only; but its use has been extended to cover not only the coming Deliverer, but also the period of blessing which he was expected to bring with him. And so the 'Messianic Age' was the age of future blessing, even though, as was often the case, there were

many who looked for an age of blessing without any special divine representative who could be called 'Messiah,' to usher it in. Hence the term 'Messianic Hope' is used to cover all those varied expectations of an optimistic character with which the Jews for many centuries faced the future.

Let us see then what the main features of this Hope were. It was essentially a religious matter ; it took account of two things, Yahweh and Israel ; round these two fixed points all the many variations revolved. The prophets were sure that a time was coming when Yahweh and His people Israel would be reunited in a bond which should never fail ; Israel would serve Yahweh in righteousness and holiness as they never had done before, and Yahweh would bless Israel with all the fulness of His richest blessings. It is essentially a religious matter—the union of God with His people Israel ; but this inward and spiritual blessing is naturally accompanied and manifested by the material prosperity and the political supremacy of Israel over all the nations of the world. Moreover, it was always expected that, when the Messianic Age came, all religions except that of Israel would cease to be practised, and

all gods except Yahweh would cease to be worshipped. Sometimes they thought that this would be brought about by the extermination of all non-Israelites ; sometimes they believed that the heathen would voluntarily submit, forsake their own gods, and seek union with Israel. Jeremiah, for example, says : ‘ O Yahweh . . . unto thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Our fathers have inherited naught but lies, even vanity and things wherein there is no profit . . . and they shall know that my name is Yahweh.’ <sup>1</sup> Other passages leave it an open question whether the Gentiles will submit or not ; if they submit, some share in Israel’s prosperity awaits them ; if not, they will be destroyed. ‘ And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, as Yahweh liveth ; . . . then shall they be built up in the midst of my people. But if they will not hear, then will I pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it,’ saith Yahweh.’ <sup>2</sup> The Gentiles who acknowledged Yahweh would, it was generally thought, share in the blessings bestowed upon Israel ; but only to a limited extent ; as a

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xvi. 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xii. 16, 17.

general rule their position was to be that of servants to Israel and they are often represented as bringing their wealth to Jerusalem for the enrichment of Yahweh's temple and the enjoyment of His people Israel. 'Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and aliens shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the priests of Yahweh ; men shall call you the ministers of our God ; ye shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.'<sup>1</sup>

It will be realised that this was indeed a strange belief for a people so insignificant as Israel. What groundless conceit, what overwhelming vanity, it must have seemed ! The Messianic Hope flew in the face of every stubborn fact of international politics. Judged by every standard known to the men of that day, Yahweh was proved an inferior God, a broken deity who had not power even to defend His own people from the calamity of exile. Whence then did this Hope spring ? On what grounds was it based ? It was based on grounds as strange as the Hope itself—on the belief that the one Almighty God had chosen Israel to be His people. Because He had chosen

<sup>1</sup> Isa. lxi. 5, 6.

them, He would one day manifest Himself to all the world in and through His people.

There was here a two-fold line of thought. In the first place the prestige which a god enjoyed in the ancient world depended upon the prosperity of his people; men's estimate of his power depended on their success in the arts of peace and war. Hence the prophets were quite sure that for His own Name's sake, for the sake of His reputation in the world, the Almighty God would yet bless and exalt His people in the eyes of all men. They were in the habit of saying that the great deeds Yahweh had done for them in the past were occasioned by His regard for His Name, His revelation of Himself.<sup>1</sup> They often appealed to Yahweh to help them for His Name's sake, pleading what the heathen will say of Him if He does not intervene.<sup>2</sup> And finally, they were quite sure that for the very same reason Yahweh will never forsake them, but will one day arise to magnify them in the sight of all men. 'Yahweh will not forsake His people, for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased Yahweh to make you a people unto

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xx. 8, 9; Ps. cvi. 8; Deut. xxxii. 26-7.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. xxxii. 11, 12; Ps. lxxix. 9, 10; Jer. xiv. 20, 21.

himself.' <sup>1</sup> 'And this city shall be to me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good I do unto them, and shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure unto it.' <sup>2</sup>

The other line of thought is much the same, except that the emphasis is laid, not on Yahweh's Name, but rather on the idea that what Yahweh has begun, He will carry through to the end. Having united Himself with Abraham and his seed, having given His promise to the patriarchs, having entered into a covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai, having sworn unto David by a faithful oath, they are sure that He will prove true to His engagements and carry out what He had promised. They know that over and over again in the past it has been only Yahweh's faithfulness to His oath that has prevented the utter destruction of His people ; they are sure that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Mount Sinai, and David, are names which cannot be pleaded in vain before Yahweh ; and finally, they know that Yahweh's choice of, and goodness to, Israel in the past, are the surest guarantee of a bright and prosperous future.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Sam. xii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Jer. xxxiii. 9.

‘Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.’<sup>1</sup> ‘Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant.’<sup>2</sup> ‘If my covenant of day and night *stand* not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David my servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them.’<sup>3</sup>

To the Prophets the age of blessing and of glory for Israel was not some far-off, divine event, but always stood ready at the doors, just about to break in upon the people sitting in darkness. As soon as the last obstacles are removed, as soon as the conditions of faith and repentance announced by the prophets are fulfilled, at once Yahweh will begin the inauguration of the Messianic Age. ‘Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been

<sup>1</sup> Micah vii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ez. xvi. 60; cf. Micah vii. 20; Jer. xxxiii. 25, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Jer. xxxiii. 25, 26.



as a river and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea ; thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the grains thereof ; his name should not be cut off nor destroyed from before me.' <sup>1</sup>

In the two centuries immediately preceding the birth of our Lord, a number of books were written to encourage the Jews to hold fast to the great beliefs and hopes which they had received from the days of the prophets, and to offer a solution to a problem which must have pressed most heavily upon many in Israel. The problem was this. If the God of Israel is Almighty, how can He allow His Saints to suffer such bitter persecution at the hands of godless men ? The answer these books give takes the form of a revelation, and hence they are commonly called the 'Apocalyptic' books. They say that long, long ago God revealed the course of all things to His chosen Saints, to Enoch, or Moses, or Isaiah, or Baruch. Of that course of things, which these friends of God were allowed to see and to describe beforehand, the present sufferings of Israel are a part ordained from the very beginning ; they are a just punishment for sins ; but the very

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlviii. 18, 19.

darkness of the hour is a proof that the dawn is at hand, the dawn of the great 'Day' of the fulfilment of the promises. God the Almighty, who in the beginning chose Israel, has conducted the whole course of the world's history to this end, and now the day of redemption is at last at hand.

We see then that the grounds of the Hope in the apocalyptic literature are the same as those in the Old Testament. A more confident assertion of the nearness of the Messianic Age was the solution offered to the problem of why the chosen people of Almighty God should be allowed to suffer so cruelly. Take away the belief that the God of Israel was the one and only God, and the problem disappears; and if there is no problem, there is no solution and no Hope; there is no reason to distinguish between Israel and other nations in respect either of present suffering or of future glory.

And again, there are expressions in the Apocalyptic books which illustrate this point. In the book of Jubilees Moses pleads, 'O Lord, my God, do not forsake thy people and thy inheritance . . . which thou hast delivered with thy great power from the hands of the Egyptians.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> i. 19-21.

Part of the answer to this pleading is as follows :  
' And the Lord will appear to the eyes of all, and all will know that I am the God of Israel and the Father of all the children of Jacob, and king on Mount Sion for all eternity. And Zion and Jerusalem will be holy.'<sup>1</sup> 'Then God will remember them on account of the Covenant which he made with their fathers, and he will manifest his compassion in those times also.'<sup>2</sup>

The Hope as it is presented in these books is in some respects very different from what we find in the Old Testament, and especially in two particulars ; it was held that the present conditions of organic life would come to an end, and that an entirely new mode of existence would set in ; and, secondly, there was a belief in a future resurrection of dead saints and heroes to share in the blessings of the Kingdom. But the essentials of the Hope remain the same ; as in the Old Testament, it is still Yahweh and Israel and their reunion which lies at the basis of all. Israel will be vindicated by the manifestation of the power of her God ; and that manifestation will involve either the destruction of the Gentiles or their submission to

<sup>1</sup> i. 28 tr. Charles.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Assumption of Moses, iv. 5, tr. Charles.

Israel's religion, so that the worship of every other God except the national God of Israel will cease. 'All the heathen will revert to the truth and the fear of God, and will bury their idols : and all the heathen will praise the Lord.' <sup>1</sup>

It seems then that this prophetic doctrine that the God of Israel is the only God and Almighty Sovereign of the universe gave rise in the hearts of the Jewish people to a confident expectation in a future manifestation of His power and glory. The prophets offered the future as the proof of their claims. If we are right, they say, certain things will happen in the future : they staked all on a coming intervention ; if that intervention failed to appear, if God failed to make good their prophecies, this must count heavily against them. We, too, feel that if God had indeed chosen that primitive tribe to the exclusion of all others, that choice must have been preparatory to a fuller self-manifestation and to the ultimate inclusion of all.

And so we turn back eagerly to see what actually did happen. For the world has travelled a long way since these prophecies were made, and having reached this vantage ground, we are in a

<sup>1</sup> Tobit xiv. 6.

position to look back and see whether history offers any confirmation of the prophetic promises.

Has anything occurred in connection with the Jewish religion, such that we can say that in this event God has plainly been fulfilling the promises which the prophets said He had made? In some respects the prophets were disappointed. They all expected political supremacy and material prosperity for Israel; and they all expected them to come within their own lifetime or very soon after; and in these respects their expectations failed of fulfilment. But these, as was seen above, were not the main essentials of the matter. The central fact of the Hope was a future manifestation of Israel's God in which God and people would be more closely united, and all men would acknowledge that the true God is in Israel. Has there been any response to this Hope of a further revelation of God and of the extension of the Jewish religion through the world?

Now it will not be easy to answer this in the negative. For if any one has ever appeared among men who knew and loved the one true God, that Person was Jesus Christ. Why is it that the world can never get away from Jesus?

History has known many great individuals who have profoundly influenced its course ; there is much that is uncertain about the historical details of their lives ; but we are under no illusion as to who and what they were ; we know that they were men, however much the hand of God may have guided their lives. It is true that here and there individuals are to be found who say the same thing of Jesus, and yet it is strange that the world is seldom quite satisfied with the way in which this view of Him is supported. Jesus is on the conscience of the world, and the world cannot make up its mind that He was merely a man. No scholarship and criticism has yet succeeded in demonstrating that. Let us blot out of our minds all thought of the Old Testament and its prophecies, let us reject with contempt the idea of any Revelation to the Jews, let the Jewish religion fade away into the dim background of primitive religions where there is no distinguishing one from another. Is it not a remarkable thing that, when all this has been done, we cannot but see in Jesus of Nazareth one who, if any one ever did, revealed God to man ? And when we have begun with this most ' reduced ' estimate of His Person, we must, if we have any

intellectual honesty, go on to consider the fact that the God He loved and spoke of was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God worshipped by the nation of Israel and by them alone. All that He was, and did, and taught must be placed to the credit of the Jewish national religion and the Jewish national God ; for it was of Him He taught and of none other ; He never knew a God who had no special connection with any one religion. And then we must also consider that He claimed to be the answer of that God to certain ancient prophecies, to certain promises said to have been given by that God in time past to the fathers. Therefore we have His guarantee that those promises were really made, that the God of the Jews was not a figment of the imagination of a primitive Semitic tribe, but indeed and in truth the Living God, the Almighty Creator. If Jesus manifested any God at all, He manifested the national God of the Hebrews.

And then we call to mind the challenge which the prophets offered ; because our God is the only God, He will in the future manifest Himself more fully to us ; and we have seen that this confidence was ultimately based upon certain

remarkable experiences, each of which commends itself to us as an instance of communion between God and man. Take either of them alone, and both Jesus and the prophets are worthy to have come from God. But they do not stand alone. The prophets, in the strength of their belief in the national God, foretold the coming of Jesus, and Jesus testified to the prophets that their God was the one true God. Together, therefore, they leap into light as a combination which is not easily set aside ; as prophecy and fulfilment, as promise and answer, as two parts of a single whole, they prove that they have a common, and that a divine, origin.

And what are we to say of the expectation that the Jewish religion would become universal ? Let us try to imagine the situation. Here is this unimportant little Palestinian state, wedged in between great empires, continually at the mercy of stronger peoples, and more than once in danger of suffering extinction. And here within this petty kingdom, there were a mere handful of men vehemently asserting that the interest of an Almighty Creator was centred on their people. Were they right or wrong ? They knew perfectly well that the facts were dead against their



belief, but some day, they said, the world will see that we are right ; a movement will arise from out of our religion which will cause all others to cease and make ours to be universal. And then we in this twentieth century recollect that as a matter of fact all the other religions by which Israel was surrounded have ceased and ceased long ago ; and stranger still, that as a result of the work of Jesus Christ, the ancient Jewish religion has appeared in a reorganised form, and spread itself and its influence in ever-widening circles down the ages, till to-day it is a more potent force, and more vividly conscious of its universal mission, than perhaps ever before.

‘ We are right,’ the prophets said, ‘ and history will yet prove the truth of our words.’ They were right and history has vindicated them. Where shall we go to find the other gods and the appointments of their worship ? To the museums or to the buried depths of the sands. But where shall we go to find the God of Israel and His sacred Scriptures ? To every land on which the sun sets ; to the language of every civilised nation ; to the hearts and homes of millions of devout believers. Could we have a clearer or more convincing vindication of the

belief of the prophets? Could faith have a more triumphant issue, a more certain answer? Could one ask from history a more satisfying proof that prophecy has been fulfilled? Surely we have every reason to conclude that the Power who governs the course of this world has supported the claims of the prophets, and by fulfilling the second part of what the prophets asserted to be a divine plan, has proved that such it was indeed.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONCLUSION

As was said before, no one at the present day imagines that there is more than one God to whom worship can be offered ; we may not worship at all, but if we do, we know that there is only one God. And if we ask whence we have come by this unquestioning belief in the unity of God, we find that it has come to us from two different sources, the philosophy of the Greeks and the Scriptures of the Hebrews. And because of this many people have come to derive their ideas about God partly from philosophy and partly from Christian teaching. Many of us like to accept Christian teaching where it accords with our common-sense philosophy, and at the same time to hold ourselves free to reject or alter anything which does not fit in well with it. And yet, if there is any truth in the foregoing pages, this combination is illogical and dangerous.

Let us observe, first of all, that these two monotheisms form each of them a clear and coherent plan or system of thought;<sup>1</sup> and that though they agree in saying that there is but one God, yet each unites with that statement a certain set of other statements from which it cannot be divorced; and these two sets of associated statements often contradict each other. We may hold to the one or to the other; but to select some elements from one, and to combine them with other elements from the other, is illogical and spoils both. For we must not forget that the philosophical conception of God was built up out of observation and reflection; it was not derived from any one religion, but was in fact fatal to all the old religions with which it came in contact; and therefore it taught that God cared nothing for the outward and organised aspect of religion. And since it arose out of an attempt to find a solution of the problem of existence as a whole, it always treated of the universe as a whole, of which man was but a minute part; and so man's doing could be but one among many other objects of interest to

<sup>1</sup> See also the Bishop of Oxford's pamphlet *The Solidarity of the Faith*, in Modern Oxford Tracts.

the Deity, if indeed they were of interest at all; accordingly, moral evil in man was not personal disobedience to God, but imperfection, one element among many in the imperfection of the universe.

On the other hand, the Christian idea of God was derived from the Hebrew prophets; it was indissolubly united with the religion of Israel as a visible religious fellowship and as an external system of religion. The God of Israel's religion was essentially a Person, eternally distinct from all created objects, and so intensely interested in the moral aspect of human conduct that He had Himself sanctioned certain moral rules and precepts. Accordingly, the Christian view of God is necessarily that of One in whose sight moral evil is no mere imperfection, but the destruction and ruination of His own creation, and a personal disobedience to His will; it also implies that God does care for the corporate side of religion, and that it is His will to sanction certain outward rites and ceremonies as assured means of approach to Himself.

And the danger of trying to combine these two views of God by choosing some elements from each and rejecting others lies in this. The Biblical view

of God claims to be derived from a Revelation ; if it is not based on a Revelation, it can have no weight or authority, for it was certainly not based on reason. In itself it forms a logical, coherent, and reasonable account of God and man, and the relations between them ; and yet this system of thought was not built up by human reasoning and reflection, but was derived from religious experience. It has been argued in this book that in these extraordinary experiences, and in the extraordinary sequence of events to which they were the prelude, we have good reason to see a divine Revelation and a divine plan of Redemption. If then we accept any element in this coherent whole, we must accept the whole ; for no one part of it has any authority which does not belong to the whole. If we accept the prophetic experiences as instances of communion between God and man, we must accept that with which they were united, the religious fellowship and system of Israel ; and this carries with it the Messiahship of Jesus, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church. Once we begin to pick and choose, and to combine Christian with philosophical notions we virtually abandon the claim to possess a Revelation, for

we select or reject Christian elements according as they agree or disagree with our philosophy ; moreover, we destroy the symmetry of the faith ; that which is left is a ' reduced,' a ' half-hearted ' Christianity ; but if there is any Revelation in it at all, that Revelation was given to save the world, and we have no right to think that this or that maimed portion of it will have the power of saving the world. A broken light is no doubt better than darkness, but it can never enlighten the whole world. If we are to have the Gospel and be saved by it, we must have it whole and entire.

It may perhaps be objected that if we regard the Jewish national religion as possessed of divine authority because of its close association with the Revelation given to the Prophets, are we not bound to accept also the primitive Hebrew ideas of science and history ? For they too formed part of the mental furnishings of the prophets. But there is a real distinction to be observed. The name of Yahweh, the national God of Israel, formed an essential part, so far as our records go, of all those religious experiences which in pre-philosophic times resulted in a belief in one holy God. Moreover,

the entire outward system of Israel's religion was transfigured by this association, and changed into something different from all existing religions. There is, therefore, good reason to think that this use of the Name Yahweh represents a definite divine choice. On the other hand, so far as we know, no special views on science or history formed any essential part of the experiences which were the real channel of the Revelation. In fact, the Hebrew conception of the universe and the Hebrew reading of history, from the purely scientific point of view, remained exactly the same after the prophetic experiences as they were before; in both cases, they were the same in kind as those of the polytheistic world in general. They are an accidental, not an essential, part of the Revelation. We are no more bound to them than we are to the Hebrew language or to the Hebrew mode of dress.

To attempt to fix the precise limits of the Biblical system of theology is another matter on which much discussion may properly arise. It does not, however, fall within the scope of the present work. But when we are told that this or that article of the Creed is contradicted by,



or is out of harmony with, modern ideas, we have to ask ourselves whether our faith is really based on the Bible as containing the record of a Revelation, or on philosophical thought. If we take our stand on the latter, all distinctively Christian elements must fall to the ground ; but if we put our trust in the former, we do not cast any slight upon the conscientious work of modern scientists and thinkers, when we point out, that 'the results of modern thought and research' are by no means a fixed and certain quantity ; what is accepted to-day is rejected, not perhaps to-morrow, but ten, twenty-five, or fifty years hence ; and new possibilities are constantly being opened up. Having in view the fact that the truth of the unity of God was first made known to the Hebrews by religious experience and afterwards found out by human reflection, may we not think that the world is being gradually educated up to the standard of what has been revealed through the prophets and Apostles, and that when all that human powers can discover has been discovered, it will be found that truth tallies with truth exactly ? God is one ; and He who made the world and gave man his power of reflecting upon its problems, is also He who

gave us a Revelation. Ultimately, there cannot be a contradiction ; we can afford to believe that time will correct our modern knowledge when it seems to conflict with the essentials of the faith. At least, it would be extremely foolish, when we are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, to surrender our belief in a Revelation every time some one claims to have made a discovery which does not seem to be reconcilable with some part of the Christian faith ; if we are to do this, we may as well abandon it at once.

And yet, while claiming that the Creed must be the ultimate test of the truth about God and our relation to Him, one ought not to overlook the important function which human study and reflection have to play. These, too, are the gifts of God and we cannot doubt that He means us to use them. A recent writer has well said that the long road of the centuries is 'littered with the broken remnants of Modernisms, abandoned, forgotten, earth-buried, moulded, dust-covered ;'<sup>1</sup> but it would be equally true to say that whatever was valuable in those Modernisms has gone to the building up, to the development of the Christian understanding of the Revelation which is re-

<sup>1</sup> Kelly, *The Church and Religious Unity*, p. 292.

corded in the Bible. Modernism is at least as old as the second century ; for it must not be understood to mean any one set of results or ideas, but simply a method of inquiry, that method which brings modern knowledge to bear upon the ancient faith and tries to interpret the two to each other. Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish modernist of the first century who tried to interpret Judaism to the Greeks and Greek philosophy to the Jews. After him came the Christian apologists of the second century, who endeavoured to present the Christian religion to the thinking world of their day as the perfect philosophy. And so it has gone on down to the present day ; every age which has seen a marked increase in human knowledge has also seen an effort on the part of Christian thinkers to test this knowledge and to place the Christian tradition in its true relation to it ; so it was when the controversy between Religion and Science was waged, and so it was while we were in process of adapting ourselves to what historical and literary criticism had to tell us. Modernism is always with us and it is well that it should be so ; for though it may occasion a period of anxiety and even of pain, yet that period is also one in which we gain a

clearer insight into the meaning of the faith. We ought to have no fear of any Modernism ; God will not lead us astray ; and it seems as though He intended that our apprehension of the faith should grow as the light of new intellectual forces and fresh ideas are brought to bear upon it.

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